

# Nevada

Historical Society Quarterly



FALL 1998

# NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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## Historical Society Quarterly

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# TO PRESERVE MORAL VIRTUE

## Opium Smoking in Nevada and the Pressure for Chinese Exclusion

Diana L. Ahmad

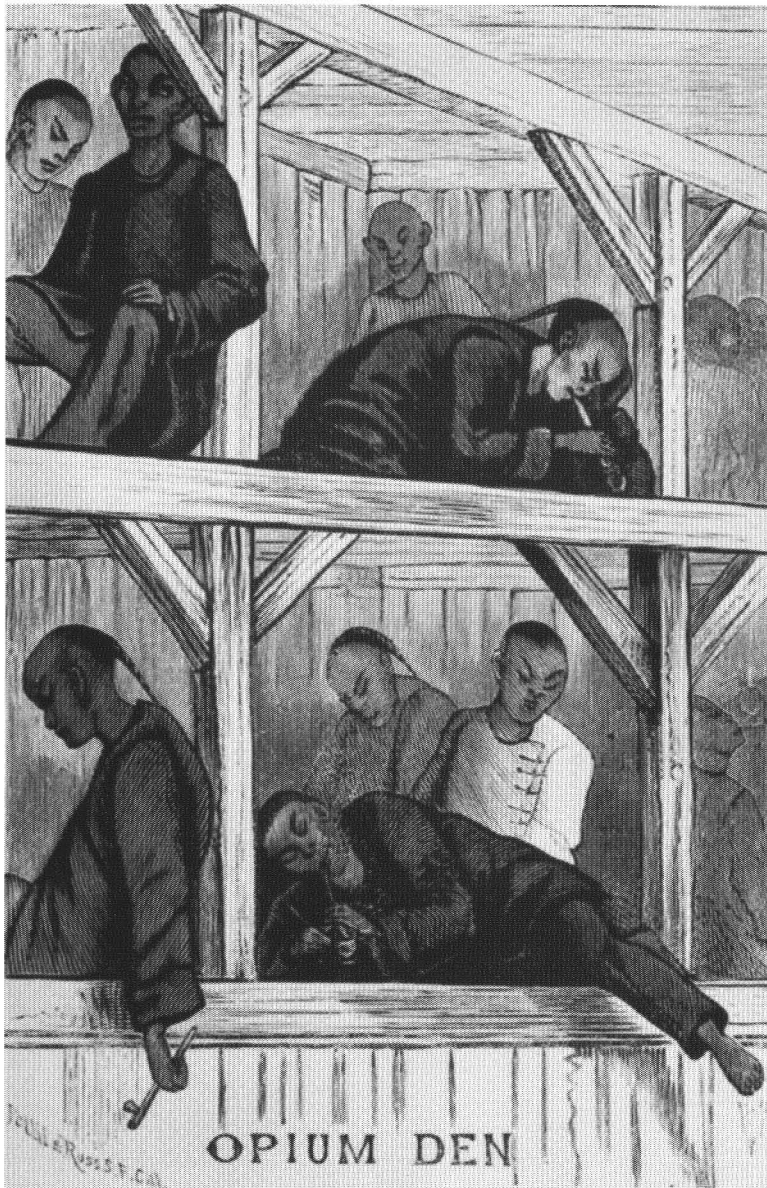
With “their souls wrapped in forgetfulness,”<sup>1</sup> men and women gathered in “loathsome resorts of degradation”<sup>2</sup> to partake of the “noxious drug”<sup>3</sup> sold to them by “soulless human reptiles.”<sup>4</sup> During the 1870s and 1880s, Nevada newspapers used these colorful characterizations to describe opium smokers, dens, and dealers. The rhetoric was particularly critical of the purveyors of the poppy’s product, the Chinese.

Many Nevadans believed that opium dens were something far more sinister than a communal gathering place for the understrata of the state’s gold and silver mining communities. They believed that the physical and behavioral effects of opium smoking threatened the Victorian moral structure that had been brought to Nevada from the eastern states. To prevent the possibility of moral deterioration, citizens sought to eradicate the opium-smoking habit from Nevada by outlawing the narcotic. But when lax enforcement of the state’s anti-opium smoking statutes rendered the laws ineffectual, the drug’s opponents moved to halt immigration by those they believed responsible for the narcotic’s importation. They sought exclusion of Chinese people, the major suppliers of the product.

It has traditionally been said that the anti-Chinese agitation in this country was centered around the beliefs that the Chinese were cheap labor, that they polluted America’s bloodstream with syphilis, and that they sent money back to China.<sup>5</sup> Nevada’s reasons for banning the Chinese included the generally accepted arguments, but beyond this, Nevada came to lead the nation in opposing Chinese immigration because of the alleged Chinese connection to opium.

Originally, Chinese came to seek their fortunes in California because of a series of political, economic, and environmental disasters in China that included

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Lithograph of opium den in Virginia City, Nevada.  
(*Nevada Historical Society*)

the near collapse of the country's agricultural economy, an increasing population, and flooding along the Yangtze River, as well as several internal and foreign wars.<sup>6</sup> Opium, too, prompted immigration to the United States because drug consumption hurt subsistence farming: Some Chinese farmers spent their profits on the opiate instead of on economic necessities. Simultaneously, Chinese farmers increased poppy-field acreage, not only making the item more accessible to the consumer, but reducing the acreage devoted to traditional crops.<sup>7</sup> In addition to these "push factors," the California gold rush served as an important "pull factor" that encouraged Chinese men to go abroad in search of their fortunes.<sup>8</sup> Opium, then, brought some Chinese to the United States. Later, it would be opium that pushed them back.

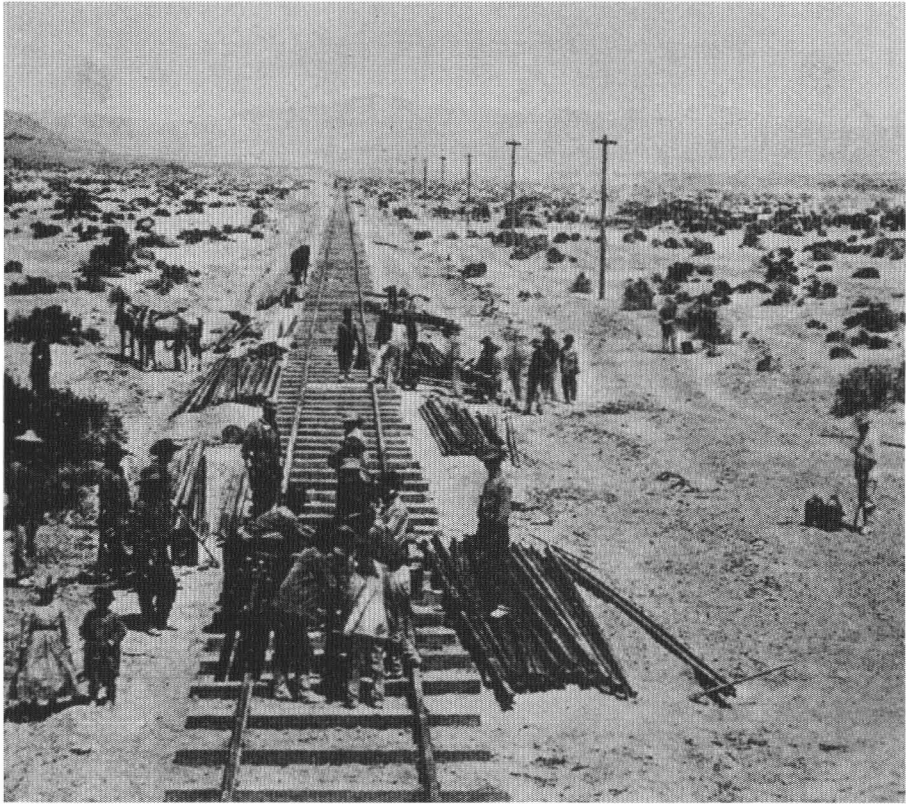
Because of limited opportunities for Chinese to improve their personal economic conditions in China, a theoretically temporary move to the United States seemed a logical and practical way to help a family's financial situation. Conditions encouraged Chinese to move to California, and then on to Nevada. The first Chinese entered the United States in 1848, and Nevada's first Chinese sojourners arrived in 1851.<sup>9</sup>

When Chinese arrived in the United States, the moral system of the country's genteel classes revolved around a Victorian ideology. American Victorians expected their civilization to be better and more sophisticated than any other.<sup>10</sup> They also expected women to be pure, pious, domestic, and submissive because American civilization depended on them, according to historian Barbara Welter.<sup>11</sup>

With these ideas forming the ideological background of elite and middle-class America, the Victorians looked at Chinese customs and judged them not on their own merits, but instead on how the Chinese way of doing things fit into American society. Aspects of Chinese culture, such as opium smoking, did not find an easy resting place in the nineteenth-century United States.

After arriving in Nevada, Chinese worked at whatever employment they could find. They built irrigation ditches and railroads, washed clothes, served as domestics, and ran opium dens. Generally, they followed the mineral strikes and frequently established Chinatowns wherever they lived for more than a few days. These communities within a community dotted the Nevada area. Russell M. Magnaghi's study of Virginia City noted that a Chinatown acted as a buffer for the Chinese against the prejudice of the white community. He wrote that whites usually ignored Chinatown and visited it only for the special services that it provided, such as exotic foods and products, gambling, prostitution, and the use of opium dens.<sup>12</sup>

Chinatowns existed in virtually every location where Chinese worked. Nevada communities that contained Chinatowns included, for example, Virginia City, the largest Chinese community outside of San Francisco, Elko, Tuscarora, and Pioche. According to the 1875 Nevada Census, 1,341 Chinese men and women lived in Storey County, the home of Virginia City; they represented 7



"Crocker's Pets" at work on the Central Pacific on the Humboldt Plains, 1868. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

percent of the county's population. In Pioche, 132 out of a population of 2,732 were Chinese. By 1880, the state of Nevada recorded its highest nineteenth-century Chinese population with 5,416, or 8.7 percent of the population.<sup>13</sup>

Accounts of Chinatown ranged from journalistic depictions to anti-Chinese diatribes. From the reporters' side, Dan De Quille, Mark Twain, and Alfred Doten, all writers for the *Territorial Enterprise*, left detailed descriptions of Virginia City's Chinatown. In De Quille's *The Big Bonanza*, he wrote that the Chinese community contained shops, gambling dens, and a joss-house (a place of worship), as well as opium dens. Twain, in *Roughing It*, commented upon the narrow streets and the variety of foods available there. Alfred Doten's diary noted the gambling dens, brothels, and New Year's celebrations to be found in Chinatown.<sup>14</sup> The reporters' descriptions generally serve as a guide to the Chinese community rather than as a moral commentary on it.

Others, however, did not hesitate to condemn Chinatown for what they viewed as its immoral and degenerative nature. Mary McNair Mathews, a long-time Virginia City resident, wrote that Chinatown was "a loathsome, filthy den. It is enough to breed cholera or any other pestilential disease." She advised visitors to the Chinatown to take carbolic acid and a pail of chloride of lime with them to ward off any malady that might come their way.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, in 1871, Grace Greenwood noted while traveling in Nevada that her "sole amusement" was watching more Chinese and Indians than she had ever seen previously. She added that Chinese made good waiters and found that "the sleeping and the dead and the Chinese are but as pictures."<sup>16</sup>

Being considered a tourist attraction did not endear Chinese to the white residents of Nevada; instead the locals found Chinese an economic, political, and moral threat. Occasionally, an anticipatory anti-Chinese movement would begin even before any Chinese had arrived. For example, on February 18, 1860, the *Territorial Enterprise* published an article requesting that the territorial legislature pass laws preventing Chinese from moving into their community. The newspaper said that the city would be "cursed by their presence," and that if no laws were passed against them "we will soon have [the Chinese] swarming as the locusts of Egypt upon us."<sup>17</sup>

The community may have believed that their fears were justified because the families of Chinese laborers did not accompany them to the United States, and Chinese men frequently spent their leisure time in places that included brothels, gambling houses, and opium dens. This caused some in the white population to consider the majority of Chinese immigrants to be vice-ridden and a threat to American society. And one of their worst vices, in contemporary opinion, was the smoking of opium.

When Chinese smoked opium, Americans were inclined to be somewhat understanding because most of them knew that Chinese families had remained in China, leaving the men with little to do in their spare time. In that regard, in 1873, *Theriaki: A Magazine Devoted to the Interests of Opium Eaters*, a journal





Laundry man, Virginia City, Nevada, 1890. (*Nevada Historical Society*)



Chinatown, Virginia City, Nevada, c. 1870s. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

published in the United States and concerned with opium addiction and its cures, commented that “there is more of charity allowable for these degraded creatures than for the white races, in that they enjoy less of the amenities of social life.”<sup>18</sup> But, when white Americans began smoking opium, the drug took on an immoral quality that the whites perceived as being Chinese.

For Nevadans, the link between the drug and the Chinese strengthened as the state’s newspapers regularly reported that the Chinese brought the practice of smoking opium to the United States. For example, in 1879, the *Tybo Weekly Sun* commented that the opium-smoking “peril increased ten fold by the introduction of the Chinese” into the United States.<sup>19</sup> Also in the same year, the *Reno Evening Gazette* declared that the Chinese were “directly responsible for this blighting vice. They imported and introduced the curse, and at their door must it be laid with a thousand other moral sins.”<sup>20</sup> As far as Nevadans were concerned, the blame for the opium-smoking habit fell, without doubt, on the Chinese.

Established by and for Chinese, the first opium-smoking establishments—referred to as dens or joints—in the United States appeared in San Francisco’s Chinatown. Readily available throughout Chinatown, opium for smoking could

be purchased at many Chinese merchants' shops and soon became available throughout the West in five-ounce tin cans priced at approximately eight dollars.<sup>21</sup>

In 1882, Dr. Harry Hubbell Kane, a leading researcher on opium smoking, explained that the practice had so expanded that a letter of introduction from an *habitu's* regular den was all that was required to gain admission to new dens elsewhere in the country. He also noted that "even the little frontier towns and mining camps have their layouts and their devotees."<sup>22</sup> Apparently, Dr. Kane's information was correct. Nevada possessed numerous opium dens that catered not only to Chinese but to members of the white community as well. As early as December 1872, the *Pioche Daily Record* matter-of-factly stated that opium dens existed in its Chinatown while in 1880, the *Tuscarora Times-Review* claimed that the town's dens were "running in full blast." Similarly, an 1881 *Territorial Enterprise* article reported the existence of "no less than a dozen places in Chinatown" to smoke opium. Further, the *Enterprise* found that young white men and women visited the dens "quite openly and in broad daylight."<sup>23</sup> The opium dens of Nevada offered their services to those who could afford them, even providing the equipment with which to enjoy the narcotic. Newspaper articles occasionally even printed the precise locations of the dens as well as complete instructions in how to smoke the drug.<sup>24</sup> These reporters' intent was probably to dissuade people from visiting the establishments; however, the articles were sufficiently informative that those with the desire to try opium could find a place to do it.

Descriptions of opium dens found in Nevada newspapers and reports differ little from accounts of dens in China, except that American opium resorts did not use bamboo or rattan furniture and matting.<sup>25</sup> By far, the best description of a Nevada opium den is that of Dan De Quille in his 1874 *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* article. He wrote that upon entering the den, he could "see nothing but the lamp, but gradually our eyes adapt themselves to the dim light and we can make out the walls and some of the larger objects in the place." Once his eyes had adjusted, he noticed that "two sides of the den are fitted up with bunks, one above the other, like the berths on shipboard. A cadaverous opium-smoker is seen in nearly every bunk. These men are in various stages of stupor. Each lies upon a scrap of grass mat or old blanket." When a new client entered the den, De Quille observed that the boss of the "cavern of Morpheus" on arising "from the table, takes up a pipe and its belongings, sleepily lights one of the small alcohol lamps and then places the whole before his customer. The old man then returns to his table and sits down. Not a word is spoken. Thus the business of the cavern goes on, day and night."<sup>26</sup>

Smoking opium required numerous pieces of equipment and a place to recline while smoking, in addition to the opiate itself. The den proprietor provided bunks to relax upon while smoking, as well as the equipment if the smoker did not possess his or her own. The opium pipe (*yen tsiang*) consisted of two

parts, the stem made from bamboo and a bowl that was attached to the end of the pipe. The process also required a needle (*yen hauck*) to prepare the opium for smoking, a lamp to heat the opium pellet, and an instrument to clean the pipe bowl (*yenshee gow*).<sup>27</sup>

Although the dens accommodated both men and women, the women received the poorest quality pipes because the Chinese believed that if women smoked from a good pipe it would become worthless and likely to split, according to Dr. Kane. A smoker who desired to possess personal equipment could, by 1888, purchase for five dollars a set consisting of a pipe, lamp, needle, and cleaning utensil.<sup>28</sup> Chinese and white prostitutes occasionally owned equipment for the convenience of their customers as well as for themselves.<sup>29</sup> In 1879, a Winnemucca judge put confiscated opium-smoking equipment on display in his office. Commenting on the exhibit, the *Winnemucca Daily Silver State* wrote that "the whole outfit has a dirty appearance, causing people who have examined it to wonder how anybody not utterly debased can enter the filthy dens and indulge in a smoke from pipes which have undoubtedly been used by leprous Chinese, and run the risk of contracting contagious diseases."<sup>30</sup>

Once the smoker acquired the necessary items, the process of smoking began. In *Roughing It*, Mark Twain described the procedure:

Smoking is a comfortless operation, and requires constant attention. A lamp sits on the bed, the length of the long pipe-stem from the smoker's mouth; he puts a pellet of opium on the end of a wire, sets it on fire, and plasters it into the pipe much as a Christian would fill a hole with putty; then he applies the bowl to the lamp and proceeds to smoke—and the stewing and frying of the drug and the gurgling of the juices in the stem would wellnigh turn the stomach of a statue.<sup>31</sup>

Although more thorough accounts exist,<sup>32</sup> Twain's words convey a vivid picture of the lengthy process, while at the same time reflecting his disgust with the habit.

Despite numerous and graphic newspaper articles about opium dens, the practice of opium smoking continued to grow in the area. From 1871 to 1876, Sing Woh, a Virginia City den proprietor, saw his sales of opium for smoking increase nearly 600 percent, from 94 ounces to 561 ounces, despite the price of two dollars per ounce, or slightly higher than in San Francisco.<sup>33</sup> Neither reporters' attempts to paint murky pictures of the dens nor the cost of the drug seemed to deter smokers.

The exact numbers of smokers in Nevada will never be known; however, Comstock area newspapers reported that by the summer of 1876, approximately 150 white men and women were indulging in the practice in Virginia City's Chinatown alone.<sup>34</sup> The spread of opium smoking generally followed the same process wherever it went. First, the Chinese smoked the drug, then the white underworld adopted the habit. In 1875, the *Virginia City Evening Chronicle* wrote that the majority of the community's smokers were young men who belonged to the "sporting fraternity" and white women who belonged "to the outcast

classes." Further, the newspaper noted that were the habit confined only to Chinese, it "would be scarcely worthy of notice," but because of the drug's spread, the newspaper felt compelled to draw its readers' attention to it.<sup>35</sup>

In 1877, reporting on opium smoking in Nevada, the *New York Times* explained that these users sought comfort from their difficult lives in the opium dens. The paper also observed that if the smoking opium habit concerned only the underworld, then it "might be well enough not to interfere." Yet, in 1879, the *Carson City Morning Appeal* disagreed, noting that "it is worth the while to save [these outcasts] from this worst and most degrading of all vices."<sup>36</sup> Despite the differences in opinion on whether or not the underworld should be saved, it is apparent that journalists were becoming aware of opium's attraction for the white community.

The next step in the spread of the opium-smoking habit occurred when the custom appeared among the "respectable classes" that included merchants, gentlemen, ladies, and children, as well as Native Americans. In 1874, the *Territorial Enterprise* reported that a young Native American woman had died in an opium den in Benton. The woman's tribe wanted the Chinese man who operated the den held responsible, but "the Chinaman got frightened and skipped."<sup>37</sup> Apparently, nothing came of the incident. Regarding children, in 1877, the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* claimed that the Chinese, "with the cunning of devils," deliberately lured young people into the opium dens. Further, Mary McNair Mathews commented that boys and girls, aged twelve to twenty, "are daily being ruined by this opium smoking."<sup>38</sup>

Also that year in another, more sensational, story about the spread of opium smoking among Nevada's youth, the *Virginia City Evening Chronicle* reported an incident involving a fifteen-year-old girl found in a D Street brothel after a four-day absence from her home. The article explained that the girl had received smoking opium from the madam, Rose Benjamin, and was told to "sleep with men." Unbeknownst to the girl's family, she smoked opium regularly in Virginia City's Chinatown and in neighboring Gold Hill's opium dens. When confronted by her parents, the girl "did not seem to experience the slightest sense of shame," but did deny sleeping with men at Benjamin's bordello.<sup>39</sup> Apparently, the use of smoking opium by students was widespread enough for the *Reno Evening Gazette* to reprimand parents for failing to warn their children about the narcotic. The newspaper also argued that schools must teach their students about the evils of the drug because the parents did not.<sup>40</sup>

The reasons for Nevadans' vehement objection to the use of smoking opium included the narcotic's alleged physical and behavioral side effects. The behavioral effects included insanity, crime, and moral degeneration. In a Victorian culture that held tightly to prescribed values, such as self-restraint in intimate behavior, these effects could be considered as deadly to a society as physical changes because they might alter the status quo.

Regarding insanity, an 1877 *Territorial Enterprise* article reported that the





Nevada State Mental Hospital in Reno, c. 1900s. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

Chinese “are preparing thousands for early graves, or worse still, to be inmates of hospitals and asylums, a burden to themselves and to their fellow-men”<sup>41</sup> as a result of smoking the narcotic. The local hospital that the newspaper may have had in mind was the Nevada Insane Asylum. The institution’s complaint-and-commitment form asked if the person to be committed was “intemperate in the use of ardent spirits, wine, opium or tobacco in any form” and what the alleged cause of the insanity might have been. A number of Chinese were committed to the Nevada facility, including Ah Gon and China Love. Both of them, according to their complaint-and-commitment papers, were intemperate in the use of opium; however, the reasons for their stay at the asylum were listed as “not known” for Ah Gon and masturbation for China Love.<sup>42</sup> Although it cannot be said with certainty that the two men used smoking opium, the likelihood of their smoking it was higher than the probability that they were taking medicinal opium. Medicinal opium required a prescription and, as Chinese doctors generally did not possess Nevada medical licenses, the odds of the men using medicinal opium were slight.

Institutionalized in the facility at the same time as China Love were two whites committed for “use of opium” and “excessive sexual excitement.” Joseph Kilpatrick, age seventy, was sent to the Nevada institution for “use of opium,” but because of his advanced age and possible medical conditions, he may have used medicinal opium. The other inmate was August McKay, age

twenty-six, the sexual excitement case.<sup>43</sup> It is possible that both Kilpatrick and McKay, who lived in Douglas and Ormsby Counties, respectively, may have visited Chinese opium dens as both counties contained a number of Chinatowns. Worthy of note, however, are the cases of China Love and August McKay, both institutionalized for problems related to sexual behavior. The opium/sexual issue, key to why many Nevadans favored Chinese exclusion and opposed smoking opium, will be discussed later.

Crime also resulted from smoking opium, according to some of the habit's opponents. Sociologist Alfred Lindesmith explained that in the nineteenth century the link between the use of smoking opium and crime developed because of the rapid spread of the narcotic into the white underworld. He noted that the drug did not cause the crime, but the desire to obtain funds to pay for it did.<sup>44</sup> Contemporary reports appear to support Lindesmith's findings. In 1877, the *New York Times* reported that in Nevada "a heavy hand should be laid on [the opium smokers] and their dissolute course checked for out of such material graduates the criminal element that vexes and disturbs society."<sup>45</sup> In 1878, the *Territorial Enterprise* also linked smoking opium and crime when it reported that a Chinese was murdered execution style for providing information leading to the arrest of four other Chinese men for selling opium.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, smoking opium caused behavioral changes in a person that resulted in moral degeneration, according to contemporary thought. For example, in 1878, J. A. Dacus, author of *Battling with the Demon*, wrote that "there can be no question as to the deleterious effects of opium on the health and morals of the people. The scenes witnessed daily and nightly in the opium dens of San Francisco, Sacramento, and other places in California, and at Virginia City testify concerning the dreadful influence of this Indian drug."<sup>47</sup> The white citizenry blamed the Chinese for the moral degradation of those who sought the pipe's pleasures. From 1876 to 1880, the *Territorial Enterprise* frequently reported that opium smoking caused its users to lose all sense of morality. One story charged that smokers sink "to a level of degradation even lower than that of the pagan brutes with whom they daily and nightly herd."<sup>48</sup> In another, the paper wrote that "the most terrible evils which Chinese immigration are bringing to this coast are not to the industries, but, through opium and lewd women, to the morals and health of the people."<sup>49</sup> The newspaper's reporters apparently considered morality more important than industrial employment for white Americans. That concept is important, because twentieth century historians consider job and economic concerns as having been paramount in the anti-Chinese campaign; however, Victorian ideology may have caused the *Territorial Enterprise* to believe that without morality the industries of the United States would decline because of a dissipated work force.

Despite the rough and uncertain life in a mining state, many people in Nevada appeared to believe in the Victorian restraints that governed society on the East Coast. Because many of the state's residents originally came from the



East, it is reasonable to assume that they accepted these principles which included the belief that women exerted great influence over those who lived under their guidance. Numerous publications of the 1870s claimed that because women ruled the home, they were in a position to dictate society's moral behavior.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, if white women frequented Chinese opium dens, they might ultimately put American civilization in jeopardy by neglecting their familial responsibilities.

The consequences of visiting an opium den went further than just spending time away from home. If the women smoked opium, they might subject themselves to its physical side effects, the most devastating of which was the narcotic's alleged ability to heighten sexual desire. Victorians believed that women must remain pure and engage in intimate behavior as rarely as possible.<sup>51</sup>

The views of nineteenth-century physicians on opium smoking fit well within Victorian ideology and the medical knowledge of the era. Like those for 800 years before them, these doctors discussed the aphrodisiac power of opium in their studies of the medical uses of the narcotic. Even the Egyptians believed that opium made them "more potent in love."<sup>52</sup> European and American doctors had long claimed that medicinal opium caused "a great promptitude to Venery, Erections, &c especially if the Dose be larger than ordinary." They also believed that if excessive amounts were taken the user might experience "venereal fury," "inclinations to venery," and "nocturnal pollutions."<sup>53</sup>

Based on their beliefs about medicinal opium, the American medical community believed that smoking opium possessed a similar aphrodisiac power. It was a logical conclusion that opium for smoking contained qualities not unlike to the medicinal variety of the substance. Also, writings available to the medical community indicated that smoking the drug produced a heightened sexuality. For example, in 1842, G. H. Smith, a surgeon in Penang, reported that young men indulged in smoking opium because the "practice heightens and prolongs venereal pleasure," although eventually the habit led to impotence.<sup>54</sup> American research agreed with the doctor from Southeast Asia.

With the possibility that women smoked opium in Chinatown's opium dens also came the possibility of their engaging in extramarital relations with men encountered in the dens. That women might experiment with sex with white men was difficult enough for Victorians to consider, but the idea of white women having intimate relations with Chinese laborers and vice operators was nearly unthinkable. Dr. Kane claimed that a woman's sexual appetite "sometimes approaches to frenzy, the woman losing all modesty" when under the influence of smoking opium.<sup>55</sup> Because of that condition, Kane believed that male smokers eagerly seduced any female smoker they encountered in the den. He wrote that California and Nevada had passed laws against smoking opium specifically to prevent just such situations.<sup>56</sup>

Kane's opinion that Nevada passed statutes and ordinances against the narcotic to maintain a high moral standard within the state may be reasonable.



George, (seated), a chef at the Depot Hotel in Elko, Nevada, 1892.  
(*Nevada Historical Society*)



Chinatown in Ely, Nevada, c 1900s. (*Nevada Historical Society*)



Belmont, Nevada, c 1920s. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

Frequently Nevada newspaper columns and state and local government representatives linked opium smoking with the downfall of a woman's virtue. While some opponents sought to ban the narcotic, others advocated prohibiting Chinese immigration in order to eliminate opium smoking.<sup>57</sup>

The cessation of Chinese immigration, some thought, would end the import of smoking opium into the country because it was believed that Chinese were the principal importers. Opponents argued that if only the drug was banned, then smugglers would supply the opiate for use in the opium dens. They also argued that if Chinese immigration could be restricted, then not only would import theoretically decrease, but so would the competition from cheap labor. Although demands to end job competition dominated the appeals for Chinese exclusion, the actions and entreaties of the opponents of opium smoking contributed to the agitation for the passage of Chinese exclusion legislation.

Nevada's legislation restricting Chinese behavior began well before attempts to outlaw opium smoking. As early as 1859, the Gold Hill Mining District prohibited Chinese from holding a mining claim in the Gold Hill area. During the next three decades, local Nevada community ordinances prevented Chinese from living where they wanted, holding title to a mine, working on public projects, and marrying whomever they wished.<sup>58</sup> Except for the marriage laws, the majority of the acts were designed to prevent Chinese from gaining too much economic power within the community or to prevent them from, as some said, sending their earnings back to China without contributing anything to the local American economy beyond their labor.

Demands to abolish Nevada's opium-smoking dens began in the mid 1870s. In March 1876, the *Territorial Enterprise* claimed that it was "a burning shame to our civilization that there seems to be no practicable method of suppressing the nuisance" that turned many white men into "slaves to the habit."<sup>59</sup> In response to calls for ordinances against opium smoking, a number of communities approved legislation abolishing opium dens. Virginia City was the nation's first to do so in September 1876. "An Ordinance to Abolish Opium-Smoking Dens" prohibited people from keeping, maintaining, visiting, or contributing to the support of any location where people met to smoke opium. The establishments were also declared "nuisances." Violators of the ordinance were to receive a fine ranging from \$50 to \$500 and/or imprisonment for ten days to six months.<sup>60</sup> Carson City's 1877 Ordinance Number 48 virtually matched Virginia City's law.<sup>61</sup> None of the ordinances directly outlawed smoking the narcotic; however, in theory, if the opium dens were illegal, then the substance would be difficult to procure.

Arrests under the new Nevada ordinances began shortly after the laws passed, but most of the opium dens opened again within a few weeks.<sup>62</sup> Because of the re-establishment of the dens, the *Territorial Enterprise* reported that young people continued their visits on a regular basis despite the law and that the police did not do enough to eliminate the dens from the city. As a result, at

a special meeting, the Virginia City Board of Police Commissioners decided to conduct random and unexpected raids on opium establishments still operating in Chinatown. Once the raids began, however, many of the dens allegedly received notice "through their spies," and police efforts to remedy the situation were therefore unsuccessful.<sup>63</sup> Another outcome of the Virginia City ordinance was the establishment of a number of new dens in Gold Hill, less than a mile from Virginia City. The *Territorial Enterprise* wondered if the Gold Hill marshal and trustees were ready for the additional "vicious characters" that might move to Gold Hill to avoid punishment under the Virginia City code.<sup>64</sup> Because the opium dens quickly reopened, many Nevadans sought stronger sanctions against the narcotic.

The Nevada state legislature took action soon after local communities began passing ordinances against smoking opium. Demands at the state level were similar to the calls for local antismoking laws. For example, the *Carson City Morning Appeal* editorialized that "it was high time that a stringent law was passed to forbid the opium traffic among our own kind."<sup>65</sup> Just as Virginia City had passed the nation's first city ordinance against opium smoking, Nevada became the first state or territory to enact a ban. Effective March 31, 1877, the statute made it illegal to use or possess opium and/or opium smoking equipment, unless through an apothecary and with a prescription. The statute made landlords responsible if anyone used smoking opium on their properties. The penalties matched those of Virginia City's ordinance calling for fines up to \$500 and/or a term in the Nevada State Prison of up to six months.<sup>66</sup> Two years later, the punishments were increased to \$1,000 and up to two years of imprisonment.<sup>67</sup> The *Morning Appeal* warned white smokers that "the social status of the offenders will not shield them from prosecution to the fullest extent of the law."<sup>68</sup> No white citizens spent time in the Nevada State Prison for violating the state's opium-smoking laws, but a few Chinese did.

The laws of Nevada attempted to prohibit the establishment of opium dens, but they did not initially address the issue of smoking opium itself. Perhaps the legislators and community representatives hoped that elimination of the dens would cause smoking to decline because smokers would be denied access to the dens, the equipment, and the camaraderie of their den friends, as well as the drug itself.

Although Nevada rapidly passed numerous ordinances and statutes that attempted to control the smoking of opium, enforcement of those regulations proved to be another matter. Nevadans complained that the laws were ineffective and that more stringent codes were needed to suppress opium smoking. Many of the concerns related to the fact that whites continued to frequent the opium resorts, rather than to the fact that the dens continued to exist. For example, in 1877, the *Tybo Weekly Sun* declared that the

laws have been enacted for the suppression of this traffic, yet we seldom hear of an



arrest being made. It may be that our officers are not aware that whites frequent these dens, yet the fact stares us in the face and cannot be denied. Earnest and decisive steps should be taken toward the suppression of the vice and the punishment of the heathen who who [sic] are engaged in the fearful traffic. Let severe measures be adopted and the sale of the drug will soon be suppressed.<sup>69</sup>

In 1879, the *Reno Evening Gazette* voiced a similar opinion, asking readers, "Is the opium smoking clause of our statutes a dead letter, or are the Chinese of Reno above the law? The question will not be answered until the opium sellers are arrested."<sup>70</sup> Enforcement of the opium-smoking laws remained important to the citizens of Nevada, and many newspaper editorials began calling for more rigorous enforcement. As noted earlier, the legislature passed a new smoking law that doubled the fines, from \$500 to \$1,000 and quadrupled the prison sentence, raising it from six months to two years.<sup>71</sup>

The editorials responded to the new law in the same manner as they did to the earlier legislation. Because white men and women continued to frequent the opium dens of Nevada, the newspapers continued to voice dissatisfaction with the government's attempts to eliminate the narcotic. The possibility of penalties did not appear to deter habitués from going to the opium resorts. The *Carson City Morning Appeal* believed that unless every white person found smoking in the dens was arrested little would change in den life.<sup>72</sup> Despite the changes in Nevada's opium laws, violations continued on a daily basis, with few arrests. Even if a person was taken into police custody, he or she could be released on bail until the court date.<sup>73</sup> That would allow the smoker to return to the den to continue smoking or to simply leave the area and avoid prosecution altogether.

By 1880, Nevada authorities were making little effort to enforce the anti-smoking statute because convicting a white man had proved almost impossible, as Chinese men could not legally testify against whites. Convictions against Chinese were also difficult to obtain because friends of the accused would lie for him to obtain a dismissal of the charges or to avoid prosecution in the first place, according to the *Territorial Enterprise*.<sup>74</sup> Opponents of the opium-smoking habit failed to consider that the drug addicted its users. Because of the nature of the narcotic, the reopening of dens or the establishment of new ones proved nearly inevitable.

Despite the difficulty of obtaining arrests for opium-smoking offenses, authorities convicted a number of Chinese and sentenced them to the Nevada State Prison for "violating the opium laws" or selling opium. The majority of those found guilty spent time in the state facility from 1879 to 1880, or just after Nevada's second opium-smoking statute became effective. For example, in 1879, the state courts found three Chinese guilty; their prison sentences varied between seven months and two years. The men's ages ranged from twenty-eight to sixty years, and their occupations were listed as miners or laundrymen. The following year, nine Chinese, including laundrymen, unemployed laborers, and

a physician, aged twenty-two to sixty, received prison sentences for up to two years for violating the antismoking law. Four of them served only two months of their eight-month sentences because they received reduced prison time for good behavior.<sup>75</sup> In the *Biennial Report of the Warden of the Nevada State Prison* for 1883, there were no new Chinese cases sentenced for opium-law violations; however, four men from the previous biennial report continued serving their prison time.<sup>76</sup> No white men or women spent time in the state correctional facility for violating the opium-smoking statutes.

Opium smoking did not stop once the men went to prison. Chinese inmates, and undoubtedly white prisoners serving time for nonopium-related crimes, were able to acquire opium and the habit from friends who smuggled the narcotic into the facility. In 1880, Ah Lung, a Chinese sentenced to two consecutive five-year terms for burglary, lost twenty days credit against his sentence because he was found with smuggled opium. Also in 1880, Ah Chuey, who was serving a life sentence for murder, had his tobacco privileges taken away because the guards caught him with opium.<sup>77</sup>

A number of Chinese sentenced under Nevada law took their convictions to the Nevada Supreme Court in an attempt to get their sentences, as well as the state opium statute, overturned. Five cases involving the 1877 and 1879 opium statutes went before the court in 1880 and 1881. The 1877 act prohibited opium dens and the sale or disposal of opium, while the 1879 law added a section that outlawed the frequenting of places maintained for the purpose of smoking opium.<sup>78</sup> The five cases addressed two major issues. First, in 1880 Ah Sam, the defendant, said that the 1879 opium act covered too many points. He claimed that Nevada law prohibited a statute from concerning itself with more than one subject. Second, three 1881 cases challenged the law against selling opium, claiming that because opium could be legally imported into the United States, its sales should be legal anywhere in the country.

In four of the cases, the Nevada Supreme Court ruled in favor of the state, with the justices' written opinions largely concerned with the health and morality of the citizens of the state of Nevada. For example, in Ah Sam's 1880 case, the court decided that the 1879 statute did, in fact, cover only one subject and that was the suppression of opium dens. Justice C. J. Beatty wrote that the law restricted the sale of opium "in order to prevent its improper use as a means of intoxication, and such restriction of its sale has an obvious tendency to break up the establishments [opium dens] at which the law is aimed." The court upheld Ah Sam's sentence in the Nevada State Prison.<sup>79</sup>

In the three other cases, the appellants claimed that opium should be considered property and that, as such, it had value and could be resold. Further, they claimed that because the opium was legally imported and the tariff fees paid, as a result, a contract existed between the United States and the opium importer that allowed the importer to dispose of the product as he saw fit. In all three cases, the court, represented by Justice J. Hawley, ruled that the opium



act did not interfere with the existing rights of property and that it did not conflict with the Nevada Constitution. Hawley claimed that the statute was correct because the state was responsible for the protection of its citizens and it should "promote the health and protect the morals of the community at large." Further, the justice wrote that opium tended "in a much greater degree to demoralize the persons using it, to dull the moral senses, to foster vice and produce crime, than the sale of intoxicating drinks. If such is its tendency, it should not have unrestrained license to produce such disastrous results." Finally, he declared that the state held the power to regulate opium's sale through such laws "as will mitigate if not suppress its evils to society."<sup>80</sup> The court upheld the prison sentences of the three Chinese.

The only case in which the court ruled in favor of the appellant was that of On Gee How, who claimed that the indictment authorizing his arrest was insufficient to warrant such action. The indictment noted that On Gee How went to number 4 South H Street in the City of Virginia; it did not, however, name the said location as a "place of resort," meaning that the document did not specify that number 4 South H Street was a known place to smoke opium. Justice Beatty ruled in 1880 that the indictment failed to describe the location as a place of resort, implying that the house might be a place of residence and not an opium den. As a result, the Supreme Court reversed the decision against On Gee How, and he was released from Nevada State Prison after a two-month incarceration.<sup>81</sup>

What makes the Supreme Court cases noteworthy is the fact that the Chinese cases could be heard at that level at all. Considering that Chinese could not testify against whites, for the Nevada Supreme Court to hear such a case, let alone overturn one as in the case of On Gee How, is especially interesting. Justice Beatty ruled in two of the cases, overturning one lower decision and sustaining the other. This indicates that the justice was willing to listen to the facts of the case and judge the statute on its own merits, and not simply uphold the lower court's decision because the appellant was Chinese.

If the decisions in the Supreme Court cases attempted to strengthen the campaign against smoking opium, they failed to achieve their goal. Opium use may have become more secretive and the den proprietors more cautious about their operations, but the dens continued to exist in Nevada. To remedy the situation, Nevada's opponents of opium smoking called for federal action.

The Nevada laws could regulate opium smoking only in the state, a relatively small geographic area. The eradication of smoking opium needed national legislation, some Nevadans claimed. In 1879, the *Reno Evening Gazette* demanded that federal officials "break up these vile resorts: arrest the Pagan vendors of the villanous [sic] stuff. Stop the traffic in men's souls, if every heaven has got to be run into the Pacific to do it."<sup>82</sup> In 1881 even the *New York Times* said that Chinese immigration caused more harm to the United States "than would the entrance of a hostile army" because of the smoking opium

they sold in their dens.<sup>83</sup> A number of people in Nevada believed that Chinese immigration and opium smoking could both be eliminated at the same time if only the federal government would help.

The United States Congress responded to demands from Nevada that differed little from the demands for Chinese exclusion that were sent to Carson City or to Nevada's newspapers. On May 6, 1882, under pressure from anti-Chinese forces, President Chester A. Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act. Nevada opinion praised Arthur's action saying that the president was "entitled to the thanks of the Pacific Coast people" and that "he has shown that he is in sympathy with his people, and fully recognizes the great danger to the country from a continued influx of Chinese."<sup>84</sup> The *Territorial Enterprise* wrote that now that the law had passed, "it will be the duty of every good citizen to unite in lessening the evils growing out of the presence of the Chinese already among us."<sup>85</sup>

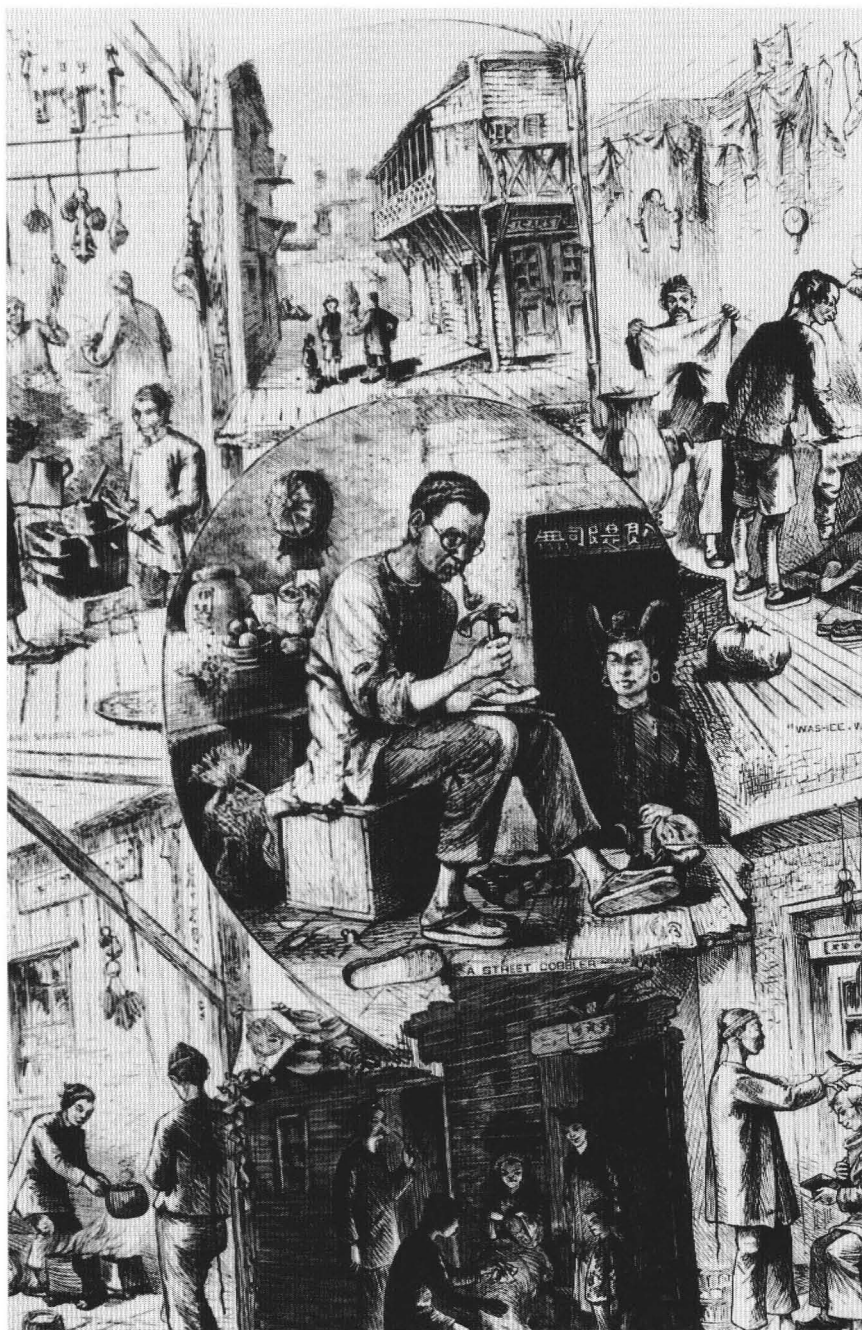
With the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and its 1902 extension, the number of Chinese in Nevada dwindled from 5,416 in 1880 to 927 in 1910.<sup>86</sup> Despite the reduced Chinese population in the state, complaints against them continued in the same tone as before. Opium smoking and its alleged challenge to good morals remained a central part of the recurring litany against the Chinese. Members of the Tuscarora Miners' Union No. 31 wrote Nevada's United States Senator William M. Stewart in 1901 that the Chinese "are a festering sore. We have seen the youth of this country enticed into their dens of vice and ruined morally and physically."<sup>87</sup> Arguments from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) the next year followed the same lines, claiming that the Chinese "would imperil every interest which the American people hold sacred for themselves and their posterity." Further, the AFL complained that the Chinese enticed pre-teenage white girls into opium dens and subjected them to evils "too horrible to imagine." The AFL continued that "it seems beyond human reason to remain indifferent to an evil so entirely destructive to our domestic ideals,"<sup>88</sup> calling to mind the central role white women played in the American Victorian household.

National efforts to end the legal entry of opium into the United States for recreational smoking purposes began with Nevada's complaints against the narcotic and culminated with the federal government's 1909 passage of "An Act to Prohibit the Importation and Use of Opium for Other than Medicinal Purposes." In seeking to pass the legislation, President Theodore Roosevelt's secretaries of state Robert Bacon (1909) and Elihu Root (1905-1909) favored a law that "would prove an important factor in the suppression of the evil in our country,"<sup>89</sup> according to Sereno Elisha Payne of the Congressional Committee on Ways and Means. Mr. Payne's comments sounded no different than remarks made thirty or forty years earlier.

The twentieth century saw numerous laws and amendments regulating opium smoking and the medicinal use of opium, and other narcotics in the

United States. The most important smoking opium legislation enacted after 1909 concerned the manufacture of smoking-opium within the country. In 1914, the federal government, in rhetoric reminiscent of earlier Nevadans, decided that the nation needed a new law to "regulate the manufacture of a dangerous product, lessening the evils to public health and to public morals which flow from commerce in the product."<sup>90</sup> This was the first time that no direct mention was made of the Chinese in discussing reasons to pass smoking-opium legislation. The fact that only around 60,000 Chinese remained in the United States by 1914 might be the reason Chinese were not mentioned in Congress's message when the legislature passed the new law.<sup>91</sup>

Unlike California, where the labor issue dominated calls for Chinese exclusion, Nevada based its decision for ending Chinese immigration on moral considerations. Even though Chinese use of drugs violated no laws prior to the Virginia City ordinance of 1876, Nevadans believed that the Chinese habit threatened the Victorian morality that accompanied the predominantly white male workers to Nevada. Neither federal Chinese exclusion laws nor local antismoking legislation ended opium's import or use in the United States. Smuggling undoubtedly increased after the 1909 legislation, but use of opium began to decline as the legal importation ended and because some white and Chinese smokers switched to other, less expensive, narcotics. For the most part, smoking opium's use was confined to those on the fringes of Nevada society, such as prostitutes, gamblers, smugglers, and den operators. But occasionally, the middle and elite classes smoked as well. It was primarily their use that concerned government officials and the population of the state.



Lithograph of Chinese Quarter in Virginia City, Nevada, 1877 from *Harper's Weekly*, December 29, 1877. (Drawn by W. A. Rogers from sketches by C. L. Sears)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"The Death Smoke," *Reno Daily Nevada State Journal*, 8 August 1876, p. 1:1.

<sup>2</sup>"Opium Smoking: The Hideous Heathen Vice in Our Midst," *Reno Evening Gazette*, 21 February 1879, p.3:3.

<sup>3</sup>"The Opium Law," *Winnemucca Daily Silver State*, 24 November 1879, p. 3:2.

<sup>4</sup>"Opium Smoking: Hideous Heathen Vice."

<sup>5</sup>For the traditional exclusion arguments see, for example, Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and company, 1909; rpt. New York: Amo Press and *New York Times*, 1969), 180; Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, "The Anti-Chinese Movement in California," *Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences*, 24:3 (1939), 11, 25, 35; Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 12, 73; Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 189, 201-2; Sue Fawn Chung, "A Brief History of the Chinese in Nevada," *The Chinese-American Experience: Papers from the Second National Conference on Chinese American Studies*, 1980 (San Francisco: The Chinese Historical Society of America and The Chinese Cultural Foundation of San Francisco, 1984), 189; Russell R. Elliott, *The History of Nevada*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 166; Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 110-12.

For an opposing view, see one of the latest works on Chinese exclusion, Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Gyory argues that few Americans, including laborers, wanted to ban Chinese immigration. Instead, politicians favored the exclusion legislation simply to garner votes based on ethnic animosities. With the exception of California, Gyory's research included few western sources. Considering that most Chinese lived and worked in the West, the omission of western views, especially labor's, is significant. Gyory's argument may be valid for the East, but he does not prove it for the West.

<sup>6</sup>Stanford Morris Lyman, *Chinatown and Little Tokyo: Power, Conflict and Community Among Chinese and Japanese Immigrants in America* (Millwood, N.Y.: Associated Faculty Press, Inc., 1986), 42-47.

<sup>7</sup>Gregory Yee Mark, "Political, Economic, and Racial Influences on America's First Drug Laws" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1978).

<sup>8</sup>Lyman, *Chinatown and Little Tokyo*, 47.

<sup>9</sup>Ira M. Condit, *The Chinaman as We See Him and Fifty Years of Work for Him* (Chicago: Missionary Campaign Library, 1900), 15; Daniel Cleveland to J. Ross Browne, 23 July 1868, George Kenyon Fitch Papers, Box 1, no. C-B761, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Sharon Lowe, "The 'Secret Friend': Opium in Comstock Society, 1860-1887," in Ronald M. James and C. Elizabeth Raymond, eds., *Comstock Women: The Making of a Mining Community* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1998): 96; Sharon Lowe, "Pipe Dreams and Reality: Opium in Comstock Society, 1860-1887," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 36:3 (Fall 1993), 178-79.

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 April 1876, Bancroft Scraps, Chinese Clippings, no. F851 .7B2, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1891), 44; *idem*, *The Times and Young Men* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1901), 121.

<sup>11</sup>Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18 (Summer 1986), 152, 174.

<sup>12</sup>Russell M. Magnaghi, "Virginia City's Chinese Community, 1860-1880," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 24 (Summer 1981), 131, 150.

<sup>13</sup>Census of the Inhabitants of the State of Nevada, 1875, Vol. 2, Tenth United States Census, 1880; Carolyn Grattan-Aiello, "The Chinese Community of Pioche, 1870-1900," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 39:3 (Fall 1996), 206.

<sup>14</sup>Dan De Quille [William Wright], *The Big Bonanza: An Authentic Account of the Discovery, History, and Working of the World-Renowned Comstock Lode of Nevada* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft and Company, 1877; rpt. Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, n.d.), 291, 388; Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Hartford, Conn: American Publishing Company, 1875), 395-7; Walter Van Tilburg Clark, ed.,

*The Journals of Alfred Doten* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1973), 28 June 1865, 839; 3 October 1865, 866-87.

<sup>15</sup>Mary McNair Mathews, *Ten Years in Nevada or, Life on the Pacific Coast* (Buffalo: Barker, Jones and Company, Printers and Binders, 1880; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 249.

<sup>16</sup>Grace Greenwood, *New Life in New Lands: Notes of Travel* (New York: J. B. Ford and Company, 1873), 175, 173.

<sup>17</sup>"The Chinese," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 18 February 1860, 2:2.

<sup>18</sup>"Opium Smoking," *Theriaki: A Magazine Devoted to the Interests of Opium Eaters*, 2:1 (July 1873), 18.

<sup>19</sup>H. H. Kane, "Opium Smoking: A New Form of the Opium Habit amongst Americans," *Gaillard's Medical Journal*, 33:2 (February 1882), 103; "Asia's Deadly Drug," *Tybo Weekly Sun*, 3 May 1879, pp. 1:1-2.

<sup>20</sup>"Opium Smoking: Hideous Heathen Vice."

<sup>21</sup>Kane, "Opium Smoking: New Form," 107; H. H. Kane, "American Opium-Smokers," *Harper's Weekly*, 25:1292 (24 September 1881): 647.

<sup>22</sup>H. H. Kane, *Opium-Smoking in America and China: A Study of its Prevalence and Effects, Immediate and Remote, on the Individual and the Nation* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1882), 8-9, 70-71.

<sup>23</sup>"A Ramble through Chinatown," *Pioche Daily Record*, 4 December 1872, p. 3:3; *Tuscarora Times-Review*, 17 November 1880, 3:2; "Opium Smoking," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 8 March 1881, p. 3:3.

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, *Virginia City Evening Chronicle*, 15 February 1876, p. 2:2; "Opium Smoking: Hideous Heathen Vice."

<sup>25</sup>See, for example, *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 28 July 1874, p. 3:2; Nathan Allen, *An Essay on the Opium Trade: Including a Sketch of Its History, Extent, Effects, etc., as Carried on in India and China* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1850), 18-21. In 1842, opium dens in Penang also resembled dens in China and the later ones in the United States. See, for example, G. H. Smith, "Abstract of a Paper on Opium-Smoking in Penang," in S. Wells Williams, *Chinese Repository*, Vol. XI, July 1842 (Canton: Printed for the Proprietors, 1842; rpt. Vaduz: Kraus Reprint Ltd., n.d.), 588-9. For a description of a modern Singapore opium den, see, for example, "Inside a Singapore Opium Den," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 4 October 1992, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup>*Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 28 July 1874, p. 3:2. See also De Quille, *Big Bonanza*, 295-6.

<sup>27</sup>For lists of opium-smoking equipment, see De Quille, *Big Bonanza*, 295; Kane, *Opium-Smoking in America and China*, 33-35; "Opium Smoking," *Theriaki*, 18.

<sup>28</sup>H. H. Kane, "American Opium-Smokers," *Harper's Weekly*, 25:1294 (8 October 1881): 683; Virgil G. Eaton, "How the Opium-Habit Is Acquired," *The Popular Science Monthly*, 33 (September 1888), 684.

<sup>29</sup>See, for example, Clark, *Journals of Alfred Doten*, 887; Bingham Dai, *Opium Addiction in Chicago* (Montclair, N.Y.: Patterson Smith, 1978; rpt. of 1937 study), 146-49.

<sup>30</sup>"The Opium Smokers' Outfit," *Winnemucca Daily Silver State*, 2 October 1879, p. 3:2.

<sup>31</sup>Twain, *Roughing It*, 395.

<sup>32</sup>See, for example, Kane, *Opium-Smoking in America and China*, 41-43. His description is detailed enough to serve as instructions for the opium smoking process.

<sup>33</sup>*Virginia City Evening Chronicle*, 15 February 1876, p. 2:2; 19 January 1876, p. 3:2-3; Kane, "Opium Smoking: New Form," 107.

<sup>34</sup>*Virginia City Evening Chronicle*, 19 January 1876; 15 February 1876; *Reno Evening Gazette*, 5 March 1881.

<sup>35</sup>Kane, *Opium Smoking in America and China*, 1; *Virginia City Evening Chronicle*, 31 March 1875, p. 3:2; *ibid.*, 8 June 1875, p. 3:2.

<sup>36</sup>"Opium Smoking in Nevada," *New York Times*, 29 July 1877, p. 10:6; "Opium Smoking," *Carson City Morning Appeal*, 2 April 1879, p. 3:2.

<sup>37</sup>"Death Smoke"; Kane, *Opium Smoking in America and China*, 72; *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 11 September 1874.

<sup>38</sup>Chinese Vices," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 7 April 1877, p. 2:1; Mathews, *Ten Years in Nevada*, 259. See also *Virginia City Evening Chronicle*, 10 February 1876, p. 2:1.

<sup>39</sup>"In the Cradle of Hell," *Virginia City Evening Chronicle*, 9 July 1877, p. 3:4-5.

<sup>40</sup>*Reno Evening Gazette*, 18 February 1881.



<sup>41</sup>"Chinese Vices."

<sup>42</sup>Complaint-and-Commitment Papers of Ah Gon, 17 February 1887, and Complaint-and-Commitment Papers of China Love, 15 May 1878, Nevada Mental Health Institute, Vol. 2, 164, 58, Nevada State Library and Archives, Division of Archives and Records, Carson City.

<sup>43</sup>"Biennial Report of the Nevada Insane Asylum, 1877-1878," 10-12, *Appendix to the Journals of the Senate and Assembly, Ninth Session, Legislature, 1877-1878*.

<sup>44</sup>Alfred Lindesmith, *Opiate Addiction* (Bloomington, Ind: Principia Press, Inc., 1947), 181, 188.

<sup>45</sup>"Opium Smoking in Nevada."

<sup>46</sup>"Pacific Coast Brevities," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 22 January 1878, p. 2:4. The idea that opium smoking and crime are connected continues into the present. See, for example, "Vietnam: The Prevention of Opium Plant Cultivation," *Saigon Times Daily*, 3 April 1997, which claimed that opium leads to crime as well as political instability.

<sup>47</sup>Joseph A. Dacus, *Battling with the Demon; or The Progress of Temperance* (St. Louis: J. W. Marsh, Publisher, 1878), 587.

<sup>48</sup>"Opium Smokers," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 8 March 1876, p. 2:3.

<sup>49</sup>"Chinese Vices."

<sup>50</sup>See, for example, Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Principles of Domestic Science; as applied to the Duties and Pleasures of Home* (New York: J.B. Ford and Company, 1871); Elizabeth Blackwell, *Counsel to Parents on the Moral Education of Their Children* (New York: Bretano's Literary Emporium, 1879); Alex M. Gow, *Good Morals and Gentle Manners for Schools and Families* (Cincinnati: Wilson, Hinkle & Co., 1873).

<sup>51</sup>David J. Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868-1900* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973), 258; Estelle B. Freedman, "Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America: Behavior, Ideology, and Politics," *Reviews in American History*, 10:4 (December 1982), 201-2.

<sup>52</sup>See, for example, Nicholas Culpeper, *The English Physician Enlarged* (England[?]: n.p., 17—), 237; John Jones, *The Mysteries of Opium Reveald* (London: Printed for Richard Smith at the Angel and Bible without Temple-Bar, 1700), 24-25, 29, 31; D. Balthasar Ludevicus Tralles, "Opium Stimulates the Sexual Impulses," 1757, notes on the history of opium, collected in research for the book *The Opium Problem*, Mildred Pellens Papers, MS C147, National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland.

<sup>53</sup>Culpeper, *The English Physician Enlarged*, 237; Jones, *Mysteries of Opium Reveald*, 24-25, 29, 31; Tralles, "Opium Stimulates the Sexual Impulses."

<sup>54</sup>G. H. Smith as quoted in Williams, *Chinese Repository*, 588.

<sup>55</sup>Kane, "Opium Smoking: New Form," 112.

<sup>56</sup>Kane, *Opium-Smoking in America and China*, 131-32; Kane, "Opium Smoking: New Form," 112. See also Charles Warrington, "Opium-Smoking in Chicago," *Chicago Medical Journal and Examiner*, 52 (February 1886), 111; H. H. Kane, "Opium Smoking from a Medical Standpoint," *Medical Gazette*, 9 (1881), 28; Kane, *Opium-Smoking in America and China*, 8.

<sup>57</sup>"Slaves to Opium," *New York Daily Tribune*, 19 June 1881, p. 7:1-2; "Topics in the Sagebrush," *New York Times*, 21 February 1881, p. 1:7-2:2; Charles H. Brent, "Report on Opium," c. 1900, Papers of Charles H. Brent, Box 40, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C..

<sup>58</sup>Magnaghi, "Virginia City's Chinese Community," 155; F. M. Huffaker and J. P. Flanningham, compilers, *Ordinances of the City of Virginia and Town of Gold Hill, Storey County, Nevada* (Virginia, Nevada: William Sutherland, 1888), 71; J. H. Graham, *Revised Ordinances of the City of Virginia, County of Storey, State of Nevada* (Virginia, NV: Enterprise Steam Printing House, 1878), 114-15; Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada*, 166, 168. See, for example, Chapters XVIII and XXVIII, *Statutes of the State of Nevada, Fifth Session, Legislature, 1871* (Carson City: Charles L. Perkins, State Printer, 1871), 62-63, 78, 152-53; Assembly Bill no. 23, 1879, Nevada Legislature, Assembly and Senate, Nevada State Library and Archives, Division of Archives and Records, Carson City; Henry C. Cutting, *Compiled Laws of Nevada in Force from 1861 to 1900* (Carson City: Andrew Maute, 1900), Secs. 5004-5006; *Statutes of the State of Nevada, Ninth Session, Legislature, 1879* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft and Company Printers, 1879), 81; Cutting, *Compiled Laws*, Sec. 2725, Chapter XXXII, An Act to Prohibit Marriages and Cohabitation of Whites with Indians, Chinese, Mulattoes, and Negroes, 28 November 1881; *Laws of the Territory of Nevada, First Regular Session, Legislative Assembly, 1861* (San Francisco: Valentine & Co., 1882), 93-94.

<sup>59</sup>"Opium Smokers," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 8 March 1876, p. 2:3.



<sup>60</sup>Graham, *Revised Ordinances of the City of Virginia*, 116. The ordinance passed on September 12, 1876. Despite San Francisco's larger Chinese population and greater number of opium dens, San Francisco did not pass an ordinance against opium dens until November 8, 1878. It outlawed the keeping, maintaining, and visiting of opium dens. Interestingly, the ordinance failed to provide punishments for violators. See Order No. 1471, "Persons Prohibited from Keeping or Visiting any Place, House or Room where Opium is Smoked," *General Orders of the Board of Supervisors Providing Regulations for the Government of the City and County of San Francisco and Ordinances of Park Commissioners* (San Francisco: W. M. Hinton and Co., Printers, 1878), 34.

<sup>61</sup>"Ordinance no. 48," *Carson City Morning Appeal*, 1 March 1879, p. 4:4. The ordinance became effective on June 12, 1877.

<sup>62</sup>See, for example, *Virginia City Evening Chronicle*, 30 July 1877, p. 3:5; "Opium Law."

<sup>63</sup>"An Opium Den Raided," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 1 April 1879, p. 3:4; "Police Commissioners: A Special Meeting of the Board Last Evening—A Raid to be Made on the Opium Dens," *ibid.*, 3 April 1879, p. 3:2-3; "The Opium Dens," *ibid.*, 8 April 1879, p. 3:4.

<sup>64</sup>*Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 22 April 1877, p. 3:4.

<sup>65</sup>"The Opium Vice," *Carson City Morning Appeal*, 12 April 1879, p. 3:1.

<sup>66</sup>*Statutes of the State of Nevada, Eighth Session, Legislature, 1877* (Carson City: John J. Hill, State Printer, 1877), 69-70. The statute was approved by the legislature on February 9, 1877.

<sup>67</sup>*Statutes of the State of Nevada, Ninth Session, Legislature, 1879*, 121-22; "A Warning to Opium Smokers," *Carson City Morning Appeal*, 16 April 1879, p. 3:2. The legislature approved the law on March 8, 1879.

<sup>68</sup>"Notice to Opium Smokers," *Carson City Morning Appeal*, 30 April 1879, p. 3:1.

<sup>69</sup>*Tybo Weekly Sun*, 24 November 1877, p. 3:2.

<sup>70</sup>"Opium Smoking," *Reno Evening Gazette*, 4 April 1879, p. 3:3.

<sup>71</sup>Chapter CXVI, "An Act to Regulate the Sale or Disposal of Opium, and to Prohibit the Keeping of Places of Resort for Smoking or Otherwise Using That Drug," *Statutes of the State of Nevada, Ninth Session, Legislature, 1879*, 121-22; "Opium Smoking," *Carson City Morning Appeal*, 9 April 1879, p. 3:2.

<sup>72</sup>"Opium Smoking," *Carson City Morning Appeal*, 5 May 1879, p. 3:1; "Opium Smokers," *Carson City Morning Appeal*, 20 May 1879, p. 3:2.

<sup>73</sup>"The Opium Cases," *Winnemucca Daily Silver State*, 25 October 1879, p. 3:2; "Three Chinamen Indicted," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 11 September 1879, p. 3:2; 16 July 1880, p. 2:3.

<sup>74</sup>"It Should Be Stopped," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, November 24, 1880, p. 2:3.

<sup>75</sup>Biennial Report of the Warden of the Nevada State Prison, 1879-1880, *Appendix to the Journals of the Senate and Assembly, Tenth Session (1881)*. For other years, see, for example, *Biennial Reports of the Wardens of the Nevada State Prison, Appendix to the Journals of the Senate and Assembly; idem, Sixth Session, 1871-1872, idem, Seventh Session, 1873-1874, idem, Eighth Session, 1875-1876, idem, Ninth Session, 1877-1878, and idem, Twelfth Session, 1883-1884*.

<sup>76</sup>Biennial Report of the Warden of the Nevada State Prison, 1881-1882, *Appendix to the Journals of the Senate and Assembly, Eleventh Session (1883)*.

<sup>77</sup>Case no. 0024, Ah Lung, Inmate Case Files, Box 0002 (1874), Nevada State Prison, Nevada State Library and Archives, Division of Archives and Records, Carson City; Case no. 0093, Ah Chuey, Inmate Case Files, Box 0005 (1879), Nevada State Prison, Nevada State Library and Archives, Division of Archives and Records, Carson City. In 1892, Ah Chuey received a pardon from the governor as a result of new evidence regarding his case.

<sup>78</sup>"An Act to Regulate the Sale or Disposal of Opium, and to Prohibit the Keeping of Places of Resort for Smoking, or Otherwise Using That Drug," approved February 9, 1877, *Statutes of the State of Nevada, Eighth Session, Legislature, 1877*, 69-70; "An Act Amendatory and Supplementary of an Act Entitled 'An Act to Regulate the Sale or Disposal of Opium, and to Prohibit the Keeping of Places of Resort for Smoking or Otherwise Using That Drug,' approved February Ninth, Eighteen Hundred and Seventy-seven," approved March 8, 1879, *Statutes of the State of Nevada, Ninth Session, Legislature, 1879*, 121-22.

<sup>79</sup>*State of Nevada v. Ah Sam*, No. 1002, January 1880, *Reports of Cases Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of Nevada, during 1880*, Vol. XV (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft and Company, 1881), 27-33.

<sup>80</sup>*State of Nevada v. Ah Chew*, no. 1047, January 1881, *Reports of Cases Determined in the Supreme*

*Court of the State of Nevada, During the Year 1881-82*, Vol. 16 (San Francisco: Bancroft-Whitney Co., 1911), 51-61. See also *State of Nevada v. Ah Gonn*, no. 1040, January 1881, *Reports of Cases Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of Nevada, during the Year 1881-82*, 61-62; *State of Nevada v. Ching Gang*, no. 1046, January 1881, *Reports of Cases Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of Nevada, during the Year 1881-82*, 62-63. In Ching Gang's case, it was also noted that he was a doctor and as a result should be allowed to deal in opium. The court ordered that he must prove he was a doctor according to Nevada statute. As he could not meet the Nevada code for being a physician, the court upheld his sentence finding him guilty of distributing opium.

<sup>81</sup>*State of Nevada v. On Gee How*, no. 1021, April 1880, *Reports of Cases Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of Nevada, during 1880*, Vol. XV, 184-187.

<sup>82</sup>"Opium Smoking: Hideous Heathen Vice."

<sup>83</sup>"Topics in the Sagebrush."

<sup>84</sup>"Signed the Bill," *Reno Daily Nevada State Journal*, 7 May 1882, p. 2:1.

<sup>85</sup>"The Law of the Land," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 10 May 1882, p. 2:1.

<sup>86</sup>*Twelfth Census of the United States; Fourteenth Census of the United States*.

<sup>87</sup>W. J. Plumb, A. L. Anderson and J. C. Doughty, Tuscarora Miners' Union no. 31, to Hon. W. M. Stewart, 25 November 1901, William Morris Stewart Papers, File 10, Box 6, Nevada Historical Society, Reno.

<sup>88</sup>American Federation of Labor, *Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion. Meat versus Rice. American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism. Which Shall Survive?* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 30, 22. See also *Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion*, 57th Cong., 1st Sess., 1902, S. Doc. 137.

<sup>89</sup>*Prohibiting the Importation and Use of Opium for Other than Medicinal Purposes*, 60th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1909, H. Rpt. 2003.

<sup>90</sup>*Manufacture of Smoking Opium*, 63rd Cong., 1st Sess., 1913, 5. Rpt. 130; see also "Chapter 1—An Act Regulating the Manufacture of Smoking Opium within the United States, and for Other Purposes," *Statutes at Large of the United States of America*, Vol. 38 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915).

<sup>91</sup>In 1910, approximately 67,000 Chinese remained in the United States, and in 1920, the Fourteenth United States Census listed only 54,000 Chinese in the country.

# THE HOUSE OF OLCOVICH

## A Pioneer Carson City Jewish Family

John P. Marschall

### PROLOGUE

The property under the steps of the Nevada State Legislature was once owned by the Olcovich brothers, who migrated to Carson City in 1863. Also in view from those steps are the sites of a jewelry store, drug store, the old *Carson Appeal* building, and a popular saloon owned by these same young immigrants from Prussian Poland. Across Carson Street to the west is the brick one-story building that was the Olcovich brothers' dry goods and clothing store dating to the Civil War. It was one of several dozen Jewish establishments lining the Carson City business district in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It served for a while after 1907 as a watering hole for locals and is now a gift and souvenir shop. The first Olcovich residence, behind the store on West Fourth Street, was sold after the turn of the century and became a residence for "working girls." The 1876 Bernhard Olcovich family home, two blocks to the north at 214 West King Street has been included in the Carson City Historic Preservation District. The Victorian-style Hyman Olcovich house, built in 1877 on a four-lot spread at 412 North Curry Street, passed through a number of owners until its recent purchase by Cactus Jack's—a casino across the street to the east and fronting on Carson City's main thoroughfare.

Twentieth-century parking problems descended on Cactus Jack's, whose only adjacent parking belonged to its larger competitor, the Carson Nugget Casino. Although a 1977 arrangement between the city and the parent company of the Carson Nugget had allowed for a sweetheart purchase of the prime property on condition it would be a parking lot open to the public, the latter condition was never met.<sup>1</sup> Cactus Jack's had to make a move. It planned to raze the Hyman Olcovich house and turn a half block of land into a parking lot for its casino customers.

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A concerned citizen of Carson offered to move the house to another area of the Historic District in order to preserve its architectural legacy. The citizens of Carson City were divided over the matter. The Historic Architectural Review Committee (HARC) voted to keep the Olcovich house in place. The Board of Supervisors (Board of County Commissioners) for Carson City and County were not compelled to act on any recommendation of HARC. Some of the supervisors were focused on the constitutional right of an owner to dispose of property in any way that serves the owner's business purposes. The issue was whether forty additional parking spaces for Carson City locals to patronize Cactus Jack's Casino were more important than maintaining a house on its original site. Lines were drawn in the local newspaper, and the crucial meeting of the Board of Supervisors was set for August 7, 1997.

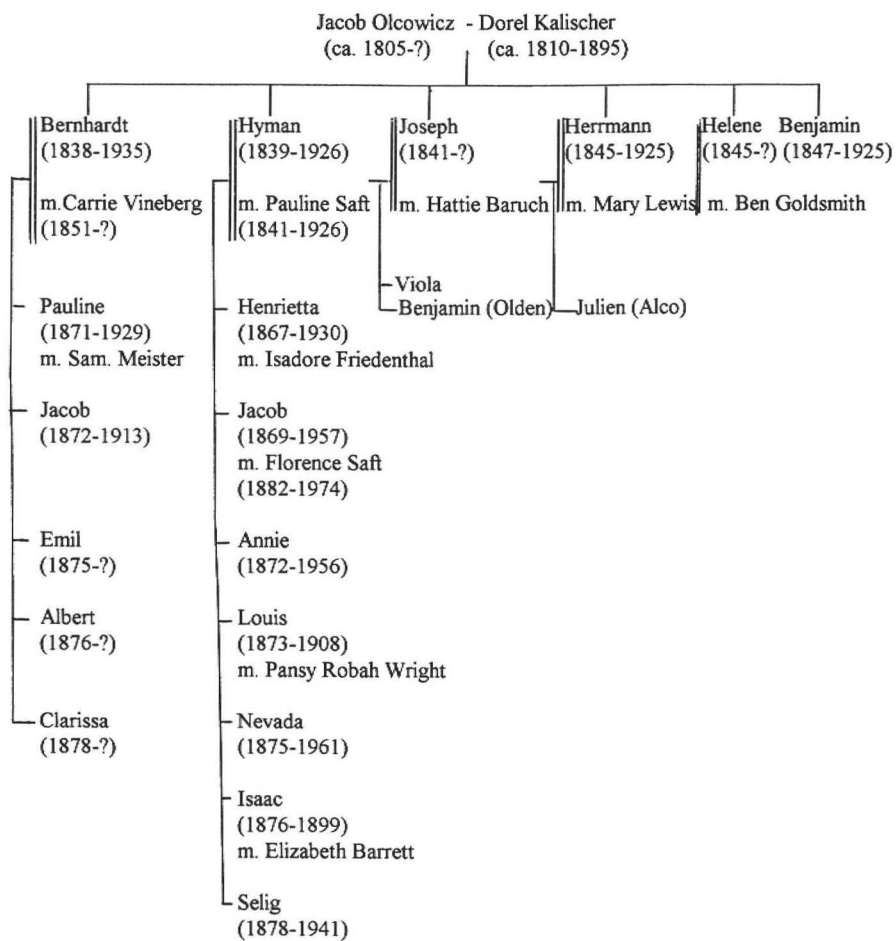
In the meantime a small group of public officials and concerned citizens had met with this writer, requesting some research to determine whether the house had any significance other than its age and Victorian architecture. It was hoped that such a study might uncover some relationship of the house to Jewish religious activity thus providing an argument for its preservation as a religious shrine. The resulting information was presented to the Board of Supervisors at the August 1997 meeting, after it had heard an elaborate proposal by local architects to transform the property into a parking lot. The chairman of HARC introduced this writer, who declared that the decision before the supervisors was not simply a choice between moving or destroying the Hyman Olcovich house. Although preliminary research did not reveal that the house had any religious significance, it was, he argued, the centerpiece of a Jewish neighborhood.<sup>2</sup>

The Board, in the estimation of most Board watchers, had come prepared to decide in favor of Cactus Jack's, whose attorney argued that the notion of a "Jewish neighborhood" was a crude fabrication. Instead, the Board moved to postpone for 120 days any further action, pending a blue-ribbon study of the downtown parking problem. In December, the Board, having heard all parties, voted that a parking lot could be paved over the grass and out-building sites of the Hyman Olcovich property, but that the house itself was to remain where it was built in 1877. It is one of the last remnants of the neighborhood of Jewish merchants whose stores once dominated the Carson City business district.

The history of the extended Olcovich family in Carson City is typical of the experiences of many mid nineteenth-century Jews who migrated to the American West from Prussian Poland. The Olcovich brothers advertised their merchandise lavishly and achieved early economic success. They openly maintained their solidarity with the larger Jewish community in Carson City but were not victimized by any semblance of anti-Semitism. They worked to find an acceptable accommodation of religious observance to the exigencies of the frontier. The brothers maintained their tradition through business cooperation

## PARTIAL OLCOVICH GENEALOGY

(Conflicts of dates have been resolved in favor of the oldest extant source)





The Hyman Olcovich Family, 1898

*From left to right: Isadore Friedenthal, Henrietta Olcovich Friedenthal, Pearl Friedenthal, Jacob Olcovich, Pauline Saft Olcovich, Leo Friedenthal, Hyman Olcovich, Selig Olcovich, Alden Olcovich, Annie Olcovich, Louis Olcovich. (Author's Collection)*



and intermarriage with families from the same Polish village in which they had been born. They exemplified the chain migration common among earlier German Jewish settlers in the midwest and south. Inevitably, some of their children chose total assimilation into an American culture which, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was comfortably Protestant. This is the Carson City history of the Olcovich clan, or house of Olcovich, whose physical homes framed the boundaries of a Jewish neighborhood a few blocks from the state capitol. Between 1877 and 1899, forty-two Jewish individuals from thirteen families lived within a few hundred yards of the Hyman Olcovich house. The structure is one of several remaining of the oldest ethnic neighborhood in the state of Nevada.<sup>3</sup>

#### EARLY YEARS IN PRUSSIAN POLAND

The story began in the Polish village of Kempen at the southern tip of the Grand Duchy of Posen. Here Jacob Olkowicz and his wife, the former Dorel Kalischer, were married November 19, 1835. They reared five sons<sup>4</sup> and one daughter. The area had come under Prussian control after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, so that village and province names were systematically Germanized.<sup>5</sup> In 1831 the total number of Kempen inhabitants was 5,682, of which 56.1 percent was Jewish.<sup>6</sup> This was a city of substance that had had its own synagogue since 1797. Unlike earlier days and in other towns and villages, Kempen Jews were no longer clustered in what was typically known as Jews' Street. They were leaders of the merchant class while contributing to their culture as translators of prayers, authors of Talmudic short stories and poetry. Jacob Olcowicz was one of these "literati" who served as a *schreib*, or letter writer and reader of replies. According to Kempen records he also carried the title of Commissioner.<sup>7</sup> In view of his status and education he may also have served as member of the *kahal*—a group of sage elders who performed administrative duties within the Jewish community. Representatives of village *kahals* met at regional meetings and provided the basis of a communications network. Jacob was doubtless familiar with those of the local Jewish population who had migrated and settled in the United States.<sup>8</sup> He would also have been keenly aware of the marginal tolerance Jews were receiving in the region of the world governed by Prussia and local Polish provincial statutes.

In 1833 the Prussian government had promised Jews full citizenship in exchange for cultural, linguistic, and social assimilation. Conditions were such that the terms were enticing. In some places Jews were not permitted to settle from rural areas into public or private towns. Those in towns were granted only limited civil rights. For example, Jews could make up no more than one third of the town council, and they were not eligible to run for judgeships. One way for Jews to achieve full citizenship was to serve in the Prussian army. However, the issue of serving in the military divided Prussian as well as Jew-

ish leaders. Military service might result in full citizenship, but not all Jews or Gentiles were prepared for the social consequences of such equality. Whether or not full political emancipation required renunciation of one's Judaism was the subject of hot debate—with Karl Marx on the side of religious freedom in his essay "On the Jewish Question."<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, between 1835 and 1852, nineteen thousand Jews left the Duchy of Posen. About a quarter of them moved to other parts of German-speaking Prussia, while the remainder emigrated to the United States, Great Britain or France. The emancipation of the Jews was inextricably connected to emancipation of the peasantry—a prospect not always favored by the Polish aristocracy. In 1848, for example, all restrictions on Jews were removed throughout Prussia and then suddenly reimposed in Prussian Poland. Posen Province issued orders disallowing the military service of Jews. In addition, Jewish residents were prohibited from hiring Christians as servants and denied private ownership of immovable property. Although Kempen had once enjoyed a rich tradition of religious observance and relative freedom, the prospects for prosperity and citizenship without religious compromise were bleak.

#### JEWISH MIGRANTS TO CARSON CITY

The political uncertainties led Jacob Olkowicz to send his children to the United States—beginning with the eldest sons, Bernhard and Joachim (anglicized to Hyman). Olcovich family remembrances note that the boys were of bar mitzvah age when they arrived in New York in the early 1850s. They knew no English but could calculate as well as read and write German.<sup>10</sup> What contacts they may have had in New York, how long they stayed in the East before heading for California and exactly when they arrived in Nevada are matters of conjecture. What is known from the record is that the brothers had been in business in Carson City no later than 1863 and had anglicized their name to Olcovich along the way.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, Carson City was in a frantic phase of growth. The three-year-old town's designation on November 25, 1861, as the capital of Nevada Territory and its designation as the state capital some three years later gave Carson City a stability not enjoyed in the more volatile Virginia City twenty miles northeast. The discovery of rich silver and gold ores in Virginia City drove the economy of Carson City and the surrounding area. The nearby Carson River was the site of processing mills, and the businesses on Carson Street hummed to support the needs of state Constitutional conventioners, state legislators, and the miners scattered in outlying camps.

There were two dozen adult male Jewish residents in Carson City in 1863, when the Olcovich brothers first appeared in the record. Most were Polish or German natives, and only four were married. Half were owners or employees of clothing stores. The remaining twelve had occupations ranging from miner

and laborer to lawyer and assayer. They had established a Hebrew Benevolent Society with a block of property purchased in 1862.<sup>12</sup> The men were also active in Masonic lodges. Carson City Lodge no. 154 was located just a few blocks west of the Carson Street business district and regularly served as the site for celebrating Jewish High Holy Days.<sup>13</sup> While the Jewish organizations provided their members with companionship and a link to their heritage, the Masonic and other fraternal organizations gave immigrant Jews a stepping stone toward Americanization and acceptance in a gentile world.<sup>14</sup>

It was no coincidence that the Olcovich brothers ended up in Carson City. Of the twenty-four adult Jewish males in 1863 at least two were from Kempen. One of these was Joseph Platt (originally Placzek), who had moved to Nevada in 1862 and established a clothing business on South Carson Street.<sup>15</sup> Another was Rabbi Jacob Sheyer, who was married to Amelia, a native of Kempen, though he himself had been born in Warsaw. He and his wife worked at the Carson Street store of Sheyer and Morris.<sup>16</sup> Others appearing in Carson City in 1864 were Solomon and Esther Abraham, married in Kempen, who had emigrated to the United States and ventured to the California gold country before the Civil War. Still more Kempenites would arrive later.

We do not know how many persons who identified themselves in census listings as having been born in Prussia were actually from the Polish Grand Duchy of Posen. Nor do we have any conclusive figures on how many of those who claimed Posen as their birthplace meant the City of Posen or meant the duchy, which included villages like Kempen. Certainly, the early arriving Olcovich brothers had some passing acquaintance with the Kempen families of Sheyers, Abrahams, and Platts as well as other Kempenites who settled in San Francisco. Although no correspondence survives, there was a communications network circulating information about neighboring Polish immigrants to the United States. The Jewish neighborhood on the lower east side of Manhattan where Hyman lived was likely a connecting spot for old friends and neighbors. Kempen immigrants stayed in touch with each other. As noted later, one of the younger Olcovich brothers, Joseph, would marry Hattie Baruch, the daughter of his parents' close friends and Kempen neighbors.<sup>17</sup>

#### THE OLCOVICH BROTHERS' BUSINESS AND REAL ESTATE

Carson City was a place that included neighbors from the old country, a somewhat observant religious community with a rabbi, and an opportunity to purchase real estate and establish citizenship without seriously compromising one's ethnic and religious heritage. The Olcovich brothers' first item of business was to rent a store that could also serve as a temporary dwelling. This they did at the corner of Fourth and Carson Streets, and by 1864 they had merchandise assessed for tax purposes at about \$17,000 in modern currency. In 1865 Hyman and Bernhard were explicitly identified as The Olcovich Brothers,

having a joint assessed merchandise valuation more than twice that of the previous year.<sup>18</sup> It is not certain that Hyman was physically present in Carson City at this early date. If he were, he would have had to return shortly after the Civil War to New York. It was there he earned his living peddling kitchenware and assisted his newly arrived brothers and sister in their acclimation to the new world. And he married Pauline Saft (b. 1841), also a native of Kempen.<sup>19</sup> They lived in a flat on Mott Street in lower Manhattan. It was here that their first two children were born: Henrietta nicknamed Yetta (b. 1867) and Jacob (b. 1869).<sup>20</sup>

Benjamin, Herman, and Joseph moved in and out of Carson City during the late sixties. Their residence when they were in town was the family store. They were not yet in a stable enough situation to be registered as voters in 1866.<sup>21</sup> Sometime in 1869 the brothers in Carson City purchased five lots bounded by Carson and Ormsby streets on the east and west, and on the south side by Fourth Street. The property included a brick store on the Carson and Fourth corner and a dwelling to the east, on the corner of Fourth and Ormsby. In 1870 the buildings and personal property had an assessed value of \$118,000.<sup>22</sup>

Bernhard, the eldest brother, had met and married Carrie Vaenberg (Vineberg), a native Californian. Their first child, Pauline (later called Paulina), was born in California in 1871. Meanwhile, Hyman brought his family from New York to Carson City via the Panamanian isthmus in the same year. Upon arrival he rejoined his brothers in the management of their general store at 312 South Carson Street. Herman and Joseph Olcovich had temporarily left Carson City for San Francisco and Mexico respectively, and it is likely that Hyman and his family moved into the Bernhard Olcovich residence at 110 West Fourth Street. Accommodations may have been a bit too cramped for baby Paulina and Carrie, for we find her again in California in 1872 giving birth to Jacob. Whether Bernhard and Carrie chose to return to California for the stated purpose of being near medical facilities, or to relieve the congestion within the house on West Fourth, or whether the birth coincided with one of many trips to San Francisco to purchase merchandise is a matter of speculation. Hyman's wife, Pauline, gave birth to their third child, Annie, in Carson City the same year, which may have finally given rise to the thought of separate households. They did not, however, immediately purchase a separate second dwelling. When the brothers acquired yet another half lot adjacent to their store, we can only surmise the reaction of their wives.

The Olcovich families and fortunes—like Carson City itself—were growing. In addition to serving the general population of Carson City and its many visitors from rural areas, the city's merchants were suppliers of the state and county governmental offices as well as the orphans' home and state prison. Whereas older, settled Jewish merchants had been doing business regularly with publicly supported institutions, it was not until 1872 that the Olcovich Bros. Dry Goods store would receive warrants from the state treasurer for re-



Olcovich Brother's Dry Goods and Clothing Store, northwest corner of Carson Street and Fourth Street. (*Author's Collection*)

imbursement. Their letterhead of that year described an inventory that had expanded well beyond basic dry goods. The brothers denoted themselves as "importers and retailers of dry goods, carpets, oil cloths, wall paper, bedding, furniture [as well as] ladies and children's shoes, etc. etc."<sup>23</sup>

Business had begun to pick up, which was reflected in a 30 percent increase in the 1872 assessed value of the store's merchandise. Herman was away on a six month buying trip to New York and San Francisco. When he returned in October he brought with him the largest supply ever received by the family store. Included in the forthcoming bargains were ladies' kid gloves "direct from Italy," which was something of a novelty in rustic Carson City.<sup>24</sup>

Profits generated more investments. Within a year the brothers purchased a lot directly across from the state capitol at Carson and King streets. Both a jewelry store and a drug store occupied the premises, which the brothers continued to own but did not operate. They acquired a vacant lot on Phillips Street near Telegraph in 1874. The Sazerac Saloon—a hundred yards from the state capitol grounds—was up for sale, and the Olcovich brothers snatched it up for \$6,000. The structure fronted on two lots, thus allowing access to the popular watering hole from both Carson Street and the newly named Curry Street to the west. The brothers Olcovich by then had land and dwellings with an assessed 1874 value of \$17,000 and personal property of \$13,800—equivalent to a little under a half million dollars by today's standards.<sup>25</sup> What one person could never have accomplished alone, the brothers were able to achieve in ten years by delegating responsibilities among themselves.

## BEING JEWISH BUT NOT KOSHER

For about a decade the Carson City Jewish community had enjoyed the services of a young native of Poland, Rabbi Jacob Sheyer, who was a dry goods merchant with Louis Morris at 31 South Carson Street. The Carson City Jewish community never built a synagogue. High Holy Day services were ordinarily conducted upstairs at the Masonic Hall, which also served as the meeting place of the Hebrew Benevolent Society. From time to time Sheyer celebrated services at Virginia City, and he performed marriages and led other religious services in private homes from Marysville to Reno. In 1873, he performed the "rite of circumcision" upon Hyman Olcovich's son Louis, at the shared family home at 110 West Fourth Street. The local press reported the event noting "the finest wines flowed without stint while the edibles for the occasion were of the finest and made to order in San Francisco."<sup>26</sup> The following year Sheyer and his wife relocated temporarily in Marysville and returned to Carson City in 1875. Jacob Sheyer died suddenly on April 9 at the age of forty-one.<sup>27</sup>

Carson City Jews were now without a rabbi, but the unselfconsciously Jewish community did not miss a beat. Joseph Kullman, in 1875 president of the Hebrew Benevolent Society, announced that Rosh Hashonah services would be held as usual at Masonic Hall on the southwest corner of King and Division Streets. He added what had become obvious over the previous decade, namely, that "all the leading dry goods and clothing houses will be closed."<sup>28</sup> Who the leader of these services may have been after Sheyer's death is not certain. Most likely it was a member of the B'nai B'rith Lodge (est. 1876) or the Hebrew Benevolent Society (est. 1862). What is certain is that until the end of the century, the Olcovich Brothers' Dry Goods establishment ran regular advertisements announcing forthcoming High Holy Days and the closure of their store. Inevitably the local press would comment that because of so many Jewish closings, "our town presents a rather sombre appearance."<sup>29</sup>

The level of religious observance by the Olcoviches was limited by their choice to settle in a place so far from a large Jewish population. The impossibility of maintaining a kosher kitchen and the economic necessity of doing business on Saturday compromised any strict observance. The Jewish Sabbath may have been observed on Friday evening privately in each home, but there is no compelling evidence that this was so. While having made the customary accommodation to sabbath observance, some of the Olcoviches took pains to maintain their special identity as Jews and sense of purpose. One of these was to form B'nai B'rith Lodge no. 266 affiliated with Grand Lodge no. 4 in San Francisco. Herman and Hyman Olcovich were listed as two of the twenty-one charter members who represented "every dry goods store in the city."<sup>30</sup> Hyman served as president of the local lodge in 1879, and both he and Herman remained faithful members for as long as membership records were kept. Bernhard, Joseph, and Benjamin never joined the group. Hyman also was singled out as



one of two Carson City contributors to the San Francisco Jewish Orphans' Home. He also was among those in 1882 who attempted unsuccessfully to raise enough money for a teacher "to educate our children in the religion of our forefathers."<sup>31</sup> Hyman's concern about his children's adherence to the principles of Judaism proved to have had a basis as his son Isaac's later attraction to American Protestantism attests.

#### REARING FAMILIES IN A JEWISH NEIGHBORHOOD

There were major transitions in the lives of the Olcoviches in the period following the rabbi's death in 1875. Young Joseph courted and married Hattie Baruch in San Francisco—demonstrating again the longevity of connections with old families from Kempen.<sup>32</sup> Hyman and Pauline had their fifth child, whom they named Nevada. Bernhard and Carrie had their third child, Emil, in San Francisco to which they appear to have traveled often. Albert, their next child, was born in Nevada in 1876. Joseph and Hattie were living at least half of the time in San Francisco, when their first child, Viola, was born. Hyman and Pauline welcomed their sixth child, Isaac, in the same year. If, noted earlier, the families of both Bernhard and Hyman were living together in the 110 West Fourth Street dwelling, conditions must have been exceedingly uncomfortable.

Accordingly, growing families and financial prosperity moved Bernhard and Hyman to buy land and build new houses. Bernhard purchased two and a half lots at Nevada and West King streets and began to build in 1875. By 1876 the brothers had added a small dwelling adjacent to the store on South Carson Street and purchased three lots containing a very small frame house on the northeast corner of Musser and Minnesota streets, which provided several options for temporary living space. The following year Hyman purchased four lots bordered by Curry, Spear, and Nevada streets a few short blocks to the north and completed his Victorian-style home in 1877.<sup>33</sup> Bernhard's family was the first to leave 110 West Fourth Street, and when Hyman moved his brood to 412 North Curry Street, the peripatetic brothers Herman, Benjamin and Joseph resided at the West Fourth Street house.

As a further investment, or a convenient hamper for the growing mountains of diapers and other soiled clothing, the brothers purchased a Chinese wash house diagonally across from the dry goods store on Carson Street. Additional acquisitions were several lots on Carson Street in the Rice and Peters and Chedic subdivisions, a mile north of the settled business district that was gradually moving away from the capitol properties. Joseph, Herman, and Bernhard were the most active buyers in the family, but in fact they were only serving as agents for each other. Assets were pooled under the name Olcovich Brothers and taxes levied accordingly.<sup>34</sup> The value of the Olcovich brothers' lands, dwellings and personal property was assessed \$1400 in taxes based on a then valuation of \$32,450 (or a little over half a million in 1998 dollars). The Nevada state



Olcovich brothers' original residence at 110 West Fourth Street. (*Author's Collection*)

legislature published the 1875 state census, which included property valuations of Ormsby County citizens. The Olcovich brothers were among Carson City's wealthiest.<sup>35</sup>

While Jewish businesses continued to line Carson Street from Fourth Street to Robinson Street, a mile to the north, their residences—after the death of Rabbi Sheyer—began to cluster in the Proctor and Green Subdivision. These properties were within walking distance of the owners' stores. The Hyman Olcovich residence at 412 North Curry Street was the largest single family dwelling in the area and included an additional lot full of shade trees. Four blocks to the south was the Bernhard Olcovich house. Between the two there were more than forty Jews who owned or rented. Within the same small block in which the Olcoviches and Platts owned their homes, the Levis and Bergmans rented from German landlords. On adjacent blocks were the Harris families and the Tobriners and the Boscowitzes. Although not exclusively Jewish, this was a neighborhood with a distinctively Jewish stamp. As early as 1880 there were more than enough adult males to have a quorum (*minyan*) for worship within a two-block radius of either house. There is, however, no evidence that an Olcovich home was ever used for religious services other than those related to a family event.<sup>36</sup>

As the state capital, Carson City felt both the boom and the bust of northern Nevada's ore production. The gross yield of minerals had peaked at \$46,671,870



Hyman Olcovich residence at 412 N. Curry Street. (*Author's Collection*)

in 1877 and steadily declined to its lowest level of \$1,995,830 in 1894.<sup>37</sup> Populations and land values dropped accordingly.

Jewish and gentile merchants alike were closing their shops and moving to new boomtowns like Bodie, California, or to the more settled life of San Diego and San Francisco. The real estate assets of the Olcovich brothers, which continued to be curiously pooled together by the Assessor's Office in its annual evaluations, also began to show a decline in value after 1880. Rather than sell during the depressed market, the Olcoviches purchased land and merchandise at bargain prices. In 1883 they secured four more lots in the Chedic and Rice and Peters subdivisions north of town on the road to Reno and Virginia City. The assessments on these lots were now a tenth of what they had been in 1877. In 1886 Joseph purchased, in his own name, a dwelling and more than a quarter of a city block at Nevada and Third streets, but these properties appeared the following year as owned by the brothers collectively. Joseph, it seems, was the aggressive real-estate agent for the family.

During the 1880s four of Hyman and Pauline Olcovich's children attended public school. Henrietta had been taking piano lessons since at least 1879, and Jacob had learned to play the violin. Henrietta soloed at the local opera house, where her mother also sang on occasion.<sup>38</sup> Annie and Louis were in second and third grade, while Nevada, Isaac, and Selig were still at home. To help manage the the large house and children, Hyman and Pauline hired a live-in

Canadian-born servant, Nellie McCormack. The employment of Christian servants by Jews had been prohibited in Kempen during Hyman's youth. Although servants were common among the wealthy in Carson City, Hyman could not have missed the irony. Herman probably visited often when he was not on the road buying merchandise or courting his future wife in the bay area. Joseph was actively purchasing property in his own name not far from the Olcovich residences. His wife, Hattie, and their daughter may have lived part of the time in Carson City and part in San Francisco. Benjamin was working closely with his brother Hyman at the store, and Bernhard—unhappy, perhaps, with the state of public education—ran unsuccessfully for the School Board in 1880.<sup>39</sup> So far, the year had been a prosperous and lively one for the Olcovich brothers.

At Bernhard's house, something was amiss. He had been out of town for half the time since the election in 1880. Carrie was thirteen years younger than her husband and had borne him five children in seven years. She was clearly unhappy in her young motherhood. Sometime between 1880 and 1883, Carrie left Bernhard and their children, ranging in age from three to twelve years. Although the marriage failed, the parting appears to have been amicable. Sometime during their marriage Bernhard had ceded to his wife the full or joint ownership of the family residence on West King Street, the jewelry store, the West Third Street lots with a dwelling as well as three vacant lots in the Rice and Peters subdivision. However, on May 19, 1883, Carrie quitclaimed to Bernhard all of her interest in this real estate for the token sum of \$5.00. This legal action postdated the divorce and so was not part of any original settlement. At this time both Bernhard and Carrie had legal residence in the city of San Francisco.<sup>40</sup> Paulina, the eldest daughter at age twelve in 1883, helped to rear the children at their second homes in California. Later in the decade Bernhard relocated permanently to Los Angeles, although he still retained the family house on West King Street until 1898. There is no evidence that he ever remarried.<sup>41</sup>

By 1891 the brothers Olcovich had systematically begun to transfer, divide or swap their common assets among each other, their wives or children. Herman made the first move. He formally disassociated himself from the Olcovich Brothers Dry Goods store and acquired ownership in his own name of the jewelry store, the wash house, and one-half interest in the printing office. He probably was not happy when the Board of Equalization raised the assessed value of these properties by almost 20 percent—at a time when values were continuing to decline. The Board raised the value again in 1895 either because it desperately needed the taxes or because Herman was no longer around to protest personally.<sup>42</sup> Of all the brothers, only Hyman maintained a permanent residence in Carson City. The other brothers were scattered along the west coast except for Benjamin, who lived with his mother and sister in Nebraska. The house of Olcovich in Carson City was disintegrating.



Bernhard Olcovich residence at 214 W. King Street. (*Author's Collection*)

#### GROWING UP AND MOVING OUT

Hyman's son Louis married Pansy Robah Wright early in 1892 at the age of nineteen. The marriage was performed by a Justice of the Peace—not by a minister or rabbi. Their only child, Alden, was born in Portland the following year. The family later moved to Denver.<sup>43</sup>

Visiting Rabbi J. L. Levy of Sacramento presided over the marriage in Carson City of the eldest daughter, Henrietta, to Isadore Friedenthal of Denver in November of 1893. He was her second cousin.<sup>44</sup> The groom's sister, Henrietta Saft Friedenthal, visited Pauline Olcovich (her cousin) a week before the wedding. The senior Olcoviches, Safts, and Friedenthals were all natives of Kempen. The marriage was another example of how immigrants from Kempen reinforced their common heritage. Pauline's two sisters (one of whom was a Kempenite married to a Kempen Shayer) also attended the wedding, and the following day the four women took the train to Virginia City to visit still other relatives. Henrietta and Isadore settled in Denver, where the Jewish population was on the rise. Pauline Olcovich became seriously ill shortly after the marriage. Ill health, as well as the comfort of grown children, relatives, and friends from the old country, may have conspired to draw Hyman and Pauline to consider Denver in their retirement.<sup>45</sup>

Annie Olcovich was a frequent visitor to the Nevada State Library during the decade of the eighties, as were her sisters, Henrietta and Nevada. At the age of sixteen she matriculated in the University of Nevada Normal School in



the fall of 1888 and graduated with a teaching diploma in 1890. She taught at Clear Creek School, serving Ormsby and Douglas Counties, from 1890 to 1894, when she moved to Denver to teach elementary school.<sup>46</sup> Denver held the attraction of old Kempen family friends and relatives including her sister Henrietta.

At the ages of twelve and ten respectively, Isaac and Selig had made their quite successful debut as owners and editors of a chatty semiweekly newspaper, *The Sun*. It gave way in 1891 to the more successful *Weekly* which lasted almost a decade.<sup>47</sup> The offices of the *Sun* and later the *Carson Weekly* were located adjacent to the Olcovich Brothers Dry Goods Store. In addition to covering local news, the boys described events of Jewish or family interest that might have been dismissed as trivial by the other newspapers. For example, they virtually documented the travels of Jewish merchants to San Francisco, which often occurred on either side of the High Holy Days. As time went on Isaac's interest turned more toward the family business, and by 1898 Selig was solely responsible for the paper. However, when he attempted to raise the subscription rate to \$1.50 per year, he lost all but his most loyal customers. He suspended publication in January of 1899, and the newspaper was absorbed by the *Carson Appeal*.<sup>48</sup>

The *Morning Appeal* of September 27, 1895, announced the death of Hyman's mother, Dorel Olcovich, at the age of eighty. She died in West Point, Nebraska, at the home of Hyman's sister, Helene Goldsmith. Benjamin, long absent from Carson City, was at her side. By 1898, Dorel's grandson Isaac and his father were the only family who still appeared on the voter's list in Carson City.<sup>49</sup> In the same year Bernhard, now permanently in Los Angeles, sold his Carson City house for \$3,000 in gold coin through a broker who two days later sold it to its longtime renter, George H. Meyers. Meyers also purchased from Bernhard a prime property, on the northwest corner of Carson and King streets, that had been quitclaimed to him in the dizzying disposition of common holdings.<sup>50</sup>

At the turn of the century only three brothers retained assets in Carson City. Joseph, who settled in San Francisco at the end of the decade, worked with his wife's family at Baruch and Company on Sansone Street. He also had real-estate interests in Mexico and Guatemala. He continued to retain ownership in Carson City of a brick store, three dwellings, and five vacant lots until at least 1905.<sup>51</sup>

Herman had a Pine Street address in San Francisco and employed an agent to handle his Carson City financial affairs in his absence. He retained ownership of the jewelry store, wash house, and printing office. Benjamin held title to a brick store and a frame dwelling whose taxes were paid by an agent. He remained unmarried.<sup>52</sup>

In one of the most contorted exchanges of property, Hyman sold the property bordering Carson, Second, and Ormsby (Curry) streets to Isaac and Selig for "services rendered" and for money owed by Hyman to his sons in March of



1898. Seven months later the two sons sold it to their mother for \$5.00 and "for the love and affection which the said parties have and bear" for her. She, in turn, sold the real estate for \$800 after she and Hyman moved to Denver. In January of 1899 Hyman and Pauline sold the family residence at 412 North Curry Street to Mrs. Eva Angeline Dunn for \$2,000 "in gold coin." This is the home that was in jeopardy of being razed or relocated in 1997.

#### THE LAST OF THE CARSON CITY HOUSE OF OLCOVICH

Young Isaac Olcovich and the popular Elizabeth Barrett had planned to marry in late March of 1899. However, Isaac became ill, and the ceremony was rescheduled to March 4. The Reverend J.B. Eddy, the local protestant Episcopal minister, performed the service at Isaac and Elizabeth's new home. Local newspapers celebrated the fact that both Isaac and Lizzie were natives of Carson City and expressed the usual hopes for health and prosperity.<sup>53</sup> There was reason for optimism. Isaac was well known as one whose "honest dealing had gained [the] confidence of everyone . . ."<sup>54</sup> By 1899 he had taken over in his own name the Olcovich Bros. well-established dry goods business at the corner of Fourth and Carson streets. His parents and six siblings, as well as his uncles, aunts, and cousins had moved to Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco, or the Pacific Northwest. The value of Isaac's inventory amounted to about \$70,000 in today's currency, giving him the independence at age twenty-three to purchase a new house for his bride to be. The future of this talented young man appeared bright, and the Olcovich name seemed destined for permanence in the capitol city. Isaac was the personification of his Polish grandfather's dream of giving his descendants new opportunities in America. However, two weeks after his marriage, Isaac Olcovich was dead.

Isaac had never recovered from what locals called "an affliction of the heart of long standing," though family tradition maintains he had tuberculosis. He was eulogized in the local press as a person of sterling qualities, highly respected, whose short life had appeared "almost flawless" on the road to a prosperous future as the proprietor of his own dry goods store. The funeral took place at Isaac and Elizabeth's new home, whose rooms were "filled" with mourners. Episcopalian minister Eddy performed the service, accompanied by his church choir and Christian hymns for the somber occasion. Isaac's pall bearers represented the ethnic and religious diversity of his friendships. He was buried in a remote section of Lone Mountain Cemetery far from the plots set aside for practicing Jews.<sup>55</sup>

One can only surmise the reasons why no member of Isaac's immediate family was present at either the marriage or the funeral. While he may have epitomized his Polish grandfather's dream of economic success for his sons, he was also the realization of his father's fears that he would grow up without proper religious education. It was over. The Olcovich dynasty in Carson City had suc-

cumbed to the quite legitimate agendas of parents, uncles and children. And death intervened to end the Olcovich name in the capitol city. It was remembered, however, a quarter century later when the *Reno Evening Gazette* considered it newsworthy that Hyman and Pauline were alive in Denver—looking forward to their sixtieth wedding anniversary. They died within a week of each other shortly after the celebration in 1926.<sup>56</sup>

#### EPILOGUE: DESCENDANTS AND SOURCES

Research on the neighborhood around the Hyman and Bernard Olcovich residences began in summer of 1997. Since then, several descendants of the family have been “discovered”—though they certainly never thought of themselves as having been “lost.” Responding to an initiative from Guy Rocha, assistant administrator for archives and records at the Nevada State Library and Archives, Jennifer Olcovich from southern California supplied an e-mail version of her husband’s family history that was compiled by Irwin Olcott, whose relationship to the family was unknown at the time. Jennifer’s husband, George, is a descendant of Louis, son of Hyman, and has retained the original family name. As this article was being written, Irwin Olcott, currently living in Santa Rosa, California, spotted a wire service story about the Olcovich house turned brothel in Carson City. He contacted the local newspaper reporter for more information and was referred to the present writer. Irwin is the eighty-seven-year-old son of Jacob, Hyman’s son who had moved to Colorado with the family in 1899. When Irwin attempted to change his name from Olcovich to Olcott in 1932, he consulted with “Aunt Annie and Veda,” who said that their father, Hyman, “should have made the same change when he was young.” The “Olcott Family History” is several typed pages in length and has proved to be quite reliable. It has been corroborated from other sources and has effectively been expanded by recent correspondence between Mr. Olcott and this author.

In July of 1998 Jim and Linda Jaffe of Santa Monica were exploring the historic sites of Carson City along the Kit Carson Trail and noticed a house whose name matched that of Jim’s ancestors. Bernhard Olcovich was his great-great-grandfather, and his great grandmother was Paulina—who had reared her brothers and sisters after her mother abandoned the family in about 1882. The author had the good fortune to interview Jim Jaffe on July 24, 1998 and is grateful for his generous cooperation as well as that of Jennifer Olcovich and Irwin Olcott in helping to excavate the origins and fortunes of the children and grandchildren of Jacob and Dorel Olcovich of “Kempen in Posen in Prussia”—as Hyman repeatedly insisted to the census enumerator.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Minutes, Carson City Board of Supervisors Meeting, December, 1977, pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>*Reno Gazette Journal* (Carson/Douglas Edition), 8 August 1997, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>The older Chinese neighborhoods in Carson City and Virginia City were destroyed long ago.

<sup>4</sup>Bernhardt (b. 1838), Joachim [Hyman] (b. January 9, 1839), Joseph (b. June 16, 1841), Herrmann (b. 1845), Helene Philipine (b. February 2, 1845 and who was likely Herman's twin), Benjamin (b. 1847), and Haskel (b. June 17, 1843, and who may have died in infancy or never left Europe, for he does not appear in any Carson City data sources.) There is also a record of a Baruch Olcovich born in 1837 who also may have died in infancy. Biographical data of Kempen Jews is taken from *Judische Gemeinde Kempen*, being a chronological register of births, marriages, and deaths in Kempen, Posen, Prussia between 1825 and 1847, located in the State Archives in Poznan and hereafter cited as JGK. Over time Bernhardt and Herrmann discontinued the German spelling of their names. The anglicized versions are used in this article.

<sup>5</sup>This article employs the German form of Polish geographical names when referenced during the period of Prussian control.

<sup>6</sup>Forty years later in 1871, the number was 6,030, of whom 40.6 percent was Jewish. Kurzawa Jan and Nawrocki Stanislaw, *Dzieje Kępna* (Warsaw-Poznan, 1978, Wydawnictwo Naukowe), 73 and 273.

<sup>7</sup>Jennifer Olcovich to Guy Rocha, 5 June 1997, citing a two-page family history by Irwin Olcott (grandson of Hyman Olcovich)(cited hereafter as "Olcott Family History"); also JGK, Syg no.63, 22 [?] Feb. 1847.

<sup>8</sup>For a recent popular description of the *kahal* in nineteenth-century Poland, see Eva Hofman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of Small Town and the World of Polish Jews*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 51-55. See also JGK and Olcott Family History.

<sup>9</sup>Artur Eisenbach, *The Emancipation of the Jews in Poland, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, England: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991), 92, 284, 286-93, 304, 340, 514.

<sup>10</sup>The Prussian government had taken vigorous measures to introduce German language and culture in the Duchy of Posen, and "the Jews were among those who learned German; thus they stood as a third party, outside both the Polish and the German ethnic group." Ruth Gay, *The Jews of Germany: A Historical Portrait* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 222-23. Young Jews would have grown up in a town like Kempen hearing Yiddish spoken, while they learned formal German in school.

<sup>11</sup>Advertisements date the establishment of the "Olcovich Bros." emporium to 1863. See, for example, *Carson Weekly*, 29 March 1892, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Ormsby County Deeds, 1862-1863, Vol. I, p. 139. C. H. Meyer to Isaac Leaser, Carson City, 13 November 1862, in "Trail Blazers of the Trans-Mississippi West," *American Jewish Archives*, 8:2, 2 October 1956, 105. The ten lots located north of the city in what was called Park Place actually became or were collateral for the Hebrew Cemetery located on the north side of Lone Mountain Cemetery.

<sup>13</sup>Myron Angel, ed. *History of Nevada, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Oakland: Thompson and West, 1881), 234; *Carson Daily Appeal*, 20 September 1865, p. 3:3.

<sup>14</sup>Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America. Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 114-15.

<sup>15</sup>Platt married Malvina Basch (anglicized to Bash) in 1868. Personal correspondence, Irwin Olcott to the author, Santa Rosa, December 28, 1998. Irwin Olcott is the eighty-seven-year-old son of Hyman Olcovich's eldest son, Jacob. He and his brother Harold, changed their name to Olcott in 1932. See also James G. Scrugham, *Nevada: A Narrative of the Conquest of a Frontier Land*, Vol II, (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1935), 99.

<sup>16</sup>Ninth U.S. Manuscript Census, 1870; JGK, which records the births, deaths, and marriages of many Sheyers variously spelled Shayer, Scheier, Scheyer, and so forth.

<sup>17</sup>There is evidence here as well as elsewhere in eastern California of what immigration historians call "chain migration." Commenting on mid-nineteenth century Jewish migration patterns, Hertzberg, *Jews In America*, notes: "various nascent Jewish communities in midwestern

or southern towns soon represented interrelated families with ties to the same places in Germany."

<sup>18</sup>Ormsby County Assessment Rolls, 1864, p. 153, and 1865, p. 70. Henceforth, all dollar amounts will be extrapolated into approximate 1998 dollar values based on composite consumer price indices in John M. McCusker, "How Much Is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 101, part 2 (October, 1991), 297ff.

<sup>19</sup>"Olcott Family History." Irwin Olcott informed the author by telephone (January 17, 1999) that Hyman never spoke of an early trip to Carson City with Bernhard.

<sup>20</sup>Marriage date: March 11, 1866. The "Olcott Family History" speculates that Hyman and his family delayed going to Carson City until after the rabbinical ordination in 1871 of Pauline's brother at the short-lived Maimonides Institute in Philadelphia. Rabbi Hyman Saft served at Mount Vernon, Indiana and was the first rabbi for the congregation in Marshall, Texas. Audrey Daniels Kariel, "Memoirs of Marshall, Texas," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 14 (April 1982), 200. Rabbi Saft was in and out of Denver from 1879 to 1899 but never seems to have held a permanent position with a congregation there. "He held a regular position with the B'nai Amoona Synagogue in St. Louis from 1894 until his death." Irwin Olcott to the author, Santa Rosa, December 28, 1899. Also see Allen duPont Breck, *The Centennial History of the Jews of Colorado: 1859-1959* (Denver: The Hirschfeld Press, 1960), 88 and 100; Ida Libert Uchill, *Pioneers, Peddlers, and Tsadikim* (Denver: Sage Books, 1957), 206-8.

<sup>21</sup>"Registered Voters of Ormsby County [October 1866] . . . Carson Precinct," in Nevada State Archives. Of the 550 voters listed, only 12 were certainly members of the Jewish community.

<sup>22</sup>These dollar values are conversions to 1998 equivalents based on McCusker's formula noted above. Actual total assessed value was \$14,200, and \$709 paid in taxes. Ormsby County Assessor's Tax Rolls, 1870, p. 56. The personal property or merchandise had a value more than twice that of the land and improvements.

<sup>23</sup>Warrant no. 309, redeemed July 31, 1872, in Warrants, Vol. II, 1872-1874, Nevada State Archives.

<sup>24</sup>*Daily State Register*, 17 October 1872, p. 3:2.

<sup>25</sup>Ormsby Assessor's Tax Rolls, 1874, p. 183.

<sup>26</sup>*Carson Daily Appeal*, 13 July 1873, p. 2:3. It was not until 1878 that nearby Virginia City's 450 Jewish residents had the luxury of a rabbinical kosher cutter affiliated with Marc Strouse's meat market. *The Territorial Enterprise*, 1 May 1878, p. 2:4.

<sup>27</sup>In 1874 Sheyer had moved to Marysville, where his property was severely damaged by winter flooding. He returned to Carson City in March of 1875 with all his goods and fell ill. He died in San Francisco. *Carson Daily Appeal*, 11 April 1875, p. 2:1.

<sup>28</sup>*Nevada Tribune*, 27 September 1875, p. 2:1.

<sup>29</sup>*Nevada Tribune*, 30 September 1875, p. 2:2.

<sup>30</sup>David A. D'Ancona, *A California-Nevada Travel Diary of 1876* (Santa Monica: Norton B. Stern, 1975), 31.

<sup>31</sup>*American Israelite*, 17 March 1882, p. 301:3.

<sup>32</sup>The Baruch connection with the Olcoviches is made by the "Olcott Family History." There is documentary evidence in the record of Kempen marriages and births that points to complex linkages of the Kalischers, Baruchs and Sheyers. There is also a birth notice of Baruch Olcovich ten months after the marriage of Jacob and Dorel. The parents are not named, and there is an indication that the child may have died at birth. JGK, Syg. #27 Births, 1837.

<sup>33</sup>Ormsby County Assessor's Tax Rolls, 1876, p. 82; 1877, p. 93. Also Donald A. Ford, "Survey of Existing Buildings in Proctor & Green Subdivision, Carson City, Nevada," prepared for Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, 1978, "Block 9, 214 W. King."

<sup>34</sup>Ormsby County Assessor's Maps and Tax Rolls, 1876, p. 82 and 1879, p. 31. The brothers added another three lots to the Rice and Peters holdings in 1884 when their fair market value had dropped by 50 percent. See Tax Rolls, 1884, p. 37.

<sup>35</sup>*Appendix to Journals of Senate and Assembly of the Eighth Session of the Legislature of the State of Nevada*. Vol. 3 (Carson City: John J. Hill, State Printer, 1877), pp. 790, 792 *et passim*. Of the 1,436 white males inventoried, about 300 declared assets subject to taxes. The five Olcovich brothers had assets in the highest 10 percent of the taxed population.

<sup>36</sup>The 1880 census shows approximately 90 Jews living and working in Carson City, of whom

more than 40 were living within a two block radius. The same census records a total population of 4,229 in the city and 5,412 in the county.

<sup>37</sup>Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 396-98. The figures cited here reflect the 1877 and 1894 valuations, respectively.

<sup>38</sup>*Morning Appeal*, 10 February 1883, p. 3:5; the reviewer cautiously allowed that "she promises to be a very accomplished pianist." The "Olcott Family History" recalls "Music lessons were routine: piano for the girls, violin for the boys."

<sup>39</sup>Ormsby County Assessor's Tax Rolls for the decade of the 1880s show only Hyman and Benjamin paying poll taxes. For Bernhard's involvement in politics, see "Political Directory," Nevada Historical Society, Reno.

<sup>40</sup>Ormsby County Deeds and Mortgages, Vol. 1-22, p. 360.

<sup>41</sup>Bernhard rented the home to George H. Meyers, another dry goods merchant, for several years before the sale in 1898. Pauline married Samuel Meister a Jewish native of Germany. They had three children and lived in California. Family photographs give the appearance of Carrie's reconciliation with some of her children in 1918. Author's interview with Jim Jaffe, great-great-grandson of Bernhard and Carrie, Carson City, July 24, 1998.

<sup>42</sup>Herman's announcement of severance from the Olcovich store appeared in the *Ormsby County Ledger*, an early undated and unpaginated publishing venture of Isaac and Selig in about 1891. See also Ormsby County Assessor's Rolls, 1892, p. 27.

<sup>43</sup>Louis died of pulmonary thrombosis on June 19, 1908. Copies of the death certificate and telegram were graciously provided to the author by Jennifer Olcovich. Pansy remarried and Alden joined the navy at about the age of eighteen. He later married Trusella Leona Mills in San Pedro, California. They had three children and continued to reside in Southern California. Alden died at Redlands in 1966 and Trusella at Oxnard in 1993.

<sup>44</sup>Henrietta's mother, Pauline Saft Olcovich, was the cousin of Pauline Saft Friedenthal—the mother of Isadore. Personal correspondence, Irwin Olcott to the author, Santa Rosa, December 28, 1998.

<sup>45</sup>*Carson Weekly*, 31 October, 6 November, 7 November, 12 December 1892, and 6 January 1893. According to the "Olcott Family History," Pauline had two sisters from Kempen living in Denver, namely, Julia Amter and Ricka Schayer. Rabbi Hyman Saft, Pauline's brother, was also affiliated from time to time with a Denver congregation. Also, Irwin Olcott recalls that Pauline's ailment was a form of heart trouble. Irwin Olcott to Jody Rice, Santa Rosa, December 3, 1998.

<sup>46</sup>*Register of the University of Nevada*, 1888-89, p. 12; [University of Nevada] *Catalogue of Graduates: 1889-1904*, p. 187. She received an M.A. degree in 1929 at the University of Denver, later served as principal of Denver Junior High School and returned to teaching English until her retirement. She remained unmarried and lived in Denver until her death in 1956. *University of Nevada Alumni Directory*, 1933, p. 153; *idem*, 1955, p. 72; *idem*, 1989, p. 137. Also personal correspondence, Irwin Olcott to the author, Santa Rosa, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>47</sup>Richard E. Lingenfelter and Karen Rix Gash, *The Newspapers of Nevada: A History and Bibliography, 1854-1979* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1984), 44-45, 47. The *Sun* had languished for a year and a half, but the *Weekly* continued publication until the first issue of 1899 when it was absorbed by the *Appeal*.

<sup>48</sup>*The Carson Weekly*, 2 January 1899, p. 3:1. Selig left Carson City early in 1899 and by 1908 was working for the *Goldfield Tribune*. The family tradition is that he later was employed as a typesetter for *The San Francisco Chronicle*. He died in 1941.

<sup>49</sup>Ormsby County List of Voters, 1898.

<sup>50</sup>Ormsby County Records, Book 29, p. 136.

<sup>51</sup>*Reno Gazette Journal* (Carson/Douglas Edition), 31 October 1998, p. 1H. One of these dwellings was the brothers' original residence at 110 W. Fourth Street, which became a brothel after it had passed through several new owners. Also see Ormsby County Assessor's Tax Rolls, 1900, p. 27.

<sup>52</sup>Ormsby County Assessor's Tax Rolls, 1900, pp. 26, 27.

<sup>53</sup>*Morning Appeal*, 5 March 1899, p. 2:3; *Carson City News*, 6 March 1899, p. 2:3.

<sup>54</sup>*Morning Appeal*, 19 March 1899, p. 3:2. The author gratefully acknowledges the invaluable research assistance of Judith Greenspan, of the Carson City Preservation Coalition. Her microfilm search of early Carson City newspapers as well as other public documents has provided a significant depth of scholarship to this work.

<sup>55</sup>*Carson City News*, 18, 20 March 1899. Also *Morning Appeal*, 21 March 1899, which also carried a public notice of thanks from Mrs. Isaac Olcovich for the support and assistance given her by so many people. The "Olcott Family History" states that Isaac had been "ill for years" with tuberculosis.

<sup>56</sup>*Reno Evening Gazette*, 20 October 1925. According to the "Olcott Family History," Hyman and Pauline's daughter, Nevada (or Veda) remained unmarried and worked as a secretary in Denver. Their son Jacob sold women's shoes for the Denver Dry Goods company and was an active member of the synagogue until his death in 1957.



# THE MORMAN CHURCH AND NEVADA GOLD MINES

Leonard J. Arrington and Edward Leo Lyman

During the worst economic depression in the history of the United States up to 1929, that of the 1890s, the highest leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, along with several other church members, purchased a cluster of promising gold mines and claims in Nye County, Nevada. Desperate for funds after a decade-long judicial onslaught by the federal government, which included confiscation and misuse of church property, these leaders believed the mining enterprise showed promise as a way to recoup the church financial security.<sup>1</sup> However, the combination of their inexperience with refining complex gold ores and their distance from the mining operations—located in one of the most lawless sections then remaining in the West—did not bode well for their aspirations.

As the so-called panic of '93 reached its low point in the intermountain West, members of the church hierarchy sought to promote a series of bold economic enterprises. They had several major purposes in view. One was to provide work for unemployed church members, and another was to develop some of the major resources and opportunities of the region. Also a major consideration was their desire to maintain control of such assets, while yet offering stock in the ventures to outside capitalists. They hoped thereby to create a body of influential friends who would be helpful during the crucial struggle for Utah's statehood. The first of these successful business contacts was the G. A. Purbeck and Company of Providence, Rhode Island, with whom the Mormon leaders soon organized the Utah Company in order to promote a number of enterprises. These included an hydroelectric power company, a railroad from Utah to southern California, a salt company, a Great Salt Lake resort, a coal mine, and a beet sugar company;<sup>2</sup> projects which eventually became the basis for the

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church's present-day financial empire.

In the process of making the preliminary plans for the railroad, Orson Smith and Jeremiah Langford, the Mormon surveyors, became interested in mining properties situated some forty miles west of the proposed railroad route. The Sterling Mine area been attracting some interest since 1869, when silver was discovered. Later, in the early 1890s, a small mill treated gold ores from a mine there, with water piped from Big Timber Spring some two miles south. But by 1893, shallow ore veins had reportedly discouraged most investors and prospectors. The Chispa Mine (later named the Congress) and the Johnnie Mine, some seven miles to the southwest, were discovered in the winter of 1890-91, and by the spring there were more than a hundred people in the notably rough camp. These mines were also later acquired by the Mormons. None was being actively worked when the Mormon surveyors came upon the scene, probably in late 1893.

Upon returning to Salt Lake City after their survey was completed, Smith and Langford requested an interview with the Mormon First Presidency, which consisted of President Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph F. Smith. The surveyors reported absolute confidence that these mining properties "would clear \$10,000 a month." As a result of the conference, the Sterling Mining and Milling Company was incorporated in Utah with a total authorized capital stock of one million dollars. Orson Smith was president and Jeremiah Langford, vice president. Each of the First Presidency was represented on the board of directors through a son, Asahel H. Woodruff, Hyrum M. Smith, and Hugh J. Cannon, secretary and treasurer.<sup>3</sup> It is not possible at this juncture to determine exactly what the initial financial arrangements were, but apparently the president and vice president made at least the initial down payment on the mining properties, to the extent of \$14,500, and the other investors put in about \$85,000, at least half of which was not from individuals, but was church money. This was done with the understanding that with such glowing prospects for success, much of the profit could be used to pay off the church's mounting debt.<sup>4</sup> Some Sterling stock was also sold to other church insiders, such as Apostle Marriner W. Merrill, from Logan, Utah, which was also Orson Smith's hometown.<sup>5</sup>

By the time of incorporation, the Sterling firm had acquired the following other properties: the Boss, Bay Dick, Mollie Vaughn, Blue Hawk, Blaze, Lube, and Magpie mines and two thirds of the Grey Eagle Mine. All of these mines were located in the Sterling and Montgomery mining districts of Nye County, which, while separated, were situated along the same ore belt. Also added were the Wide West and Queen mines in the same county but outside the main mining districts. These properties were situated about 20 miles northwest of Pahrump, 80 miles northwest of the then-active mining camp of Vanderbilt in California's San Bernardino County, and 250 miles from the current Utah Central railhead at Milford.

The company's working capital was obviously meager, judging from the fact that early in December 1894 Orson Smith called on President Woodruff to inform him of the immediate need for an additional \$5,000. The church leader borrowed that amount the next day from a Salt Lake City bank, using other good stock the church possessed as collateral. This sum apparently helped complete the erection of two ten-stamp mills at the mines. The company president affirmed to the church president that "when the mill got to running it would help us pay our debts," by which he meant the church's financial obligations.<sup>6</sup>

Mid-spring of 1895 saw the mining and milling operations produce two gold bars worth \$3,600, which were sent to the company's bank creditors. A report in late April 1895 mentioned \$4,000 worth of gold produced in eight days. In a May report ten days later, Orson Smith stated they had taken 12,000 tons from the Sterling mine, at a rate of 24 tons per day. With ore assaying at \$20 per ton, Woodruff anticipated that this meant a gross of \$240,000 from the stockpile on hand. Just five days later the church leader noted the arrival of 15.5 pounds of gold from the Sterling Mine. The total yield for the period is not known, but these brief diary notes from May record what appear to be the high point of production for the mines so far as is known, at least while they were in the possession of the Mormon church. This would have been dreadful news to President Woodruff, who had recently written that he was "glad we are beginning to get something from the mine to assist us." There was, however, another small brick of gold sent in mid summer, and a large brick worth \$8,000 from the Johnnie Mine in September.<sup>7</sup>

On April 9, 1895, the Sterling Mining and Milling Company completed a significant additional acquisition of mining properties in the same vicinity. It purchased the Johnnie and Chispa mines and several related claims, mill sites, water rights, and equipment appertaining thereto from the Harding Paper Company of Franklin, Ohio.<sup>8</sup> The first of these claims had been discovered in January 1891 by prospector George Montgomery, who spied a quartz ledge studded with gold nuggets while resting from his perhaps futile search for the lost Breyfogle Mine. The discoverer named this first rich strike the Chispa, meaning nugget in Spanish. There was a subsequent year of excitement in the newly formed Montgomery mining district, but all development of the mines there halted early in 1892, partly, it was alleged, because Montgomery's "extravagant management" was ruining his backers. One of these, perhaps an early partner, William L. Dechant, sold his interest to the Ohio company, which shortly thereafter sold it through a Utah mining broker, Samuel Godbe, to the Sterling company for \$50,000.<sup>9</sup>

At about the same time that the Sterling company purchased the Johnnie and Chispa, Frank Cole, who grubstaked the original locators, and James Ashdown, a millwright at the Johnnie, apparently bought a major interest in the Confidence Mine. A renegade Indian named Bob Black had located this claim on the California side of the obscure desert border after being shown a

promising ledge by his cousin, Mary Scott. Sources differ as to whether it was George or his brother, E. A. "Bob" Montgomery, who purchased the remaining interest, for \$11,000. Both commenced developing the property even as the more personable George was persuading the Sterling operators to get their company to buy out Cole and Ashdown, which they did for a price variously reported at between \$24,000 and \$81,000. Abraham H. Cannon, a young Mormon apostle in whom the higher church authorities had extreme confidence, had just returned from examining the route through the vast area his Salt Lake and Los Angeles Railroad was to traverse. In connection with Jeremiah Langford, Cannon had become convinced that the California mining properties, including the nearby Mendocino Mine, should be added to the growing holdings of the Sterling company and he so recommended to the First Presidency of the church.<sup>10</sup>

Probably it was at this point that the Sterling company engaged in some high financial maneuvers which allowed it to generate the capital for the additional purchases. The company issued 150 bonds with a face value of \$1,000 each. Using these as security, \$96,500 was borrowed from Zion's Savings Bank, a financial institution largely controlled by the church and often utilized for its business transactions. All three members of the First Presidency signed the Sterling company notes as official representatives of the church. Thus when the mining company subsequently failed to pay the debt the church was compelled to assume it. By July 1898, the Sterling company obligation for \$131,867, which would have included accrued interest, was included among the church liabilities.<sup>11</sup>

Meantime, throughout the spring and summer of 1895, the Latter-day Saints First Presidency maintained a steady stream of correspondence with their agents in Nevada encouraging them to meet the company's financial obligations as much as possible without drawing on church funds. In one of these they frankly confessed that while they were not inclined to complain, their own position was "a very painful one. We are strained to the uttermost and scarcely know which way to turn." They added that they felt the need to let their partners understand their desperate financial situation. Another theme of these letters was the need for careful accounting of all expenditures and the exercise of caution with the other owners of the Montgomery properties so that they would not become dissatisfied with Sterling company management of their mutual affairs. The church leaders further warned that the outside associates—presumably meaning the Montgomery brothers—could apply to the county court for a receiver to operate the property if the Sterling managers could not demonstrate that they had operated economically and in a business-like manner. As late as August, the Salt Lake City stockholders were still encouraging their Nevada-based brethren to examine the mining-claim options surrounding their properties and to secure those which appeared most promising.<sup>12</sup>

Undoubtedly the succession of disappointments arising from Sterling's



E. A. "Bob" Montgomery, c. 1915, center with friends at Indian Springs.  
(*Nevada Historical Society*)

mines commenced in the late summer of 1895, when armed conflict erupted over possession of the Chispa property. The church's mining operators, Orson Smith and Jeremiah Langford, may have been remiss in not discovering that the mandatory assessment work had not been kept up on this claim or that the prior foreman of that mine, Angus McArthur, had staked his own claim on the property. On the other hand, although most sources state that such assessment work was not current, the Chispa overseers had maintained a skeleton crew on the premises, which indicates no such negligence on their part.

Whatever the case, McArthur secured the services of several well-armed men, including the gambler and fugitive from justice, Phil Foote (to whom he reportedly offered half interest in the mine if he were successful in taking control of the property), Billy Moyer, George Morris, and Jack Longstreet, erroneously referred to in subsequent Salt Lake City newspaper accounts as "Check Longstreet, a halfbreed." The last was actually a longtime area resident and sometime gunfighter whose notoriety merited him a good modern biographer. On the morning of August 28, these men occupied the mining dump and awakened the caretakers with gunshots into the air. At that point Foote and his cohort informed the startled Sterling men that they should vacate the area. The gunmen subsequently turned away the crew reporting for their day's work

at the mine, and when Sterling officials Orson Smith and Hugh Cannon approached later, they were told that if they crossed a certain line they would be shot. At that juncture, Nye County Sheriff, Charles McGregor, in his dual capacity of assessor, arrived on the scene. But since the closest justice of the peace was some two hundred miles away at the county seat of Belmont, no arrest warrants were available, and the sheriff did not deem himself empowered to interfere in the absence of such authorization.

Unable to do more, the mine officers and sheriff-assessor rode to a ranch in Pahrump Valley to confer with Angus McArthur but were unsuccessful in persuading him to call off his gunmen. Next day the group returned to the mine to converse with the occupiers, who made a demand of \$12,000 cash to satisfy their claims. McArthur asserted he could show that that amount was owing him, though he never did so. Sheriff McGregor termed the affair an "outrage" and promised that with proper authority he would arrest the entire group. He thereupon departed for Belmont, promising to return as soon as he could. As Orson Smith reported to his Utah associates, they had done everything they could to avoid trouble and bloodshed and would continue to do so. Smith assured them that the Sterling people had the sympathy of "all reasonable-minded men of the place," partly because their mining and milling operations were the only ones active in the entire county. Smith also stated that their place of operations, presumably meaning the Johnnie, was then noted as "the most quiet camp in the country" and that its operators were regarded as consistently law abiding.<sup>13</sup>

However, George and Bob Montgomery, still part owners and operators of some of the mines—and perhaps feeling responsible since George did owe McArthur a legitimate debt, but more likely merely impatient with supposed claim jumpers, reacted in the more traditional manner of the unwritten law of the West. They dispatched an agent to Los Angeles to secure two cases of rifles, which were promptly shipped via the Nevada Southern Railroad to within fifty miles of their destination. Apparently two gunmen, Peter Reed and Harry Ramsey, were also engaged by the Montgomerys, who aimed to retake the property by force. Although the initial news report described a "terrible fight" between miners and "desperados" that resulted in the deaths of two of the latter, and a third probably fatally wounded, in actuality only Phil Foote, shot in the chest, was a casualty. The various accounts agree that while the occupants of the Chispa property were seated at breakfast, the Montgomery men surprised them with a volley of gunfire. At that juncture, according to what is probably the most accurate version of events, Longstreet, realizing the situation was hopeless and still hopeful that with proper care the wounded Foote could be saved, hoisted a flag of surrender and relinquished control of the premises. Foote succumbed later in the day.

The only county newspaper of the era, the *Belmont Courier*, disputed the widely circulated Los Angeles dispatch that reported several deaths, noting



that Jack Longstreet, supposedly one of the victims, rode into the county seat in the evening of September 14. Some later accounts state he was then in custody, but since the two county sheriff's deputies sent to the Montgomery district had not yet returned, it is more likely that Longstreet gave himself up. A former resident of the nearby Moapa Valley, he probably opted for legal resolution of the matter, as he had done on several previous occasions.<sup>14</sup>

With the Sterling and Montgomery people again in possession of the Chispa property, it is doubtful that they sought to press legal matters further. No one was ever indicted for the death of Foote, partly because of his reputation and partly because the law enforcement officials declared themselves unable to determine who fired the fatal shot. McArthur, who had good connections at Belmont, where he had recently visited friends, was also never indicted for his crucial role in the claim-jumping scrape. But the three surviving companions of Foote were prosecuted on the charge of "drawing and exhibiting a deadly weapon," an action, which in the absence of law enforcement in that region, was almost essential. Despite the fact that Longstreet, at least, retained an attorney, the three were convicted and fined. For reasons unknown, Longstreet received by far the heaviest fine, \$3000, and each prisoner was informed that he would have to serve one day in jail for every \$2 in unpaid fines. They all served some time in jail, although Longstreet eventually posted \$800 bail and headed for a distant mining camp with Morris, who had completed his shorter sentence.<sup>15</sup>

The Nye County newspaper thereafter reported good gold production in the Montgomery district. This would have been almost exclusively from the Sterling mining properties, and optimism was supposedly prevailing throughout the area. However, that was not the feeling among the highest Mormon leaders who controlled the destiny of the mining and milling company. Operations continued through the fall season at several of the mines, but the Johnnie, on which the key investors appear to have pinned most hope for financial relief, did not produce according to expectations. On November 9, church leaders guaranteed \$16,835 in past-due accounts with two Salt Lake City brokerage firms, McKenzie and Rossiter and Clayton and Spence. Three days later, letters from Jeremiah Langford and Hugh Cannon again reported unfavorable Sterling prospects. This timing was not good because another payment was just then due, and paid, on the Confidence Mine.<sup>16</sup>

Later that same week, Abraham H. Cannon reported in his journal that the decision had been made—presumably by the First Presidency—to attempt to sell the Sterling Mining and Milling Company, if possible, for \$300,000. Mining broker Samuel Godbe, who had been instrumental in some of the company acquisitions, was authorized to place the property on the market, and Apostle Cannon was assigned to inform the company president, Orson Smith, of the decision, clearly made in his absence.<sup>17</sup> Since nothing was ever publicly announced concerning sale of the company, the decision was obviously reconsid-



Johnnie Mine in Nye County, Nevada. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

ered, perhaps after Godbe notified the Utah stockholders that the sale could not be made at the desired price during the continuing depths of the economic depression.

Disillusionment and impatience with the mining property and its managers are abundantly clear in the source documents. The first and most exasperating problem was the continued drain on church funds to meet the persistent additional expenses of Sterling's operation. Finally, in late November, the company's president was called before the First Presidency and pointedly told that the company could not draw any more on church accounts. Yet bank overdrafts continued to embarrass the company and church leaders in the ensuing weeks.<sup>18</sup>

And much more serious, it was becoming irrefutably evident that the gold from the Montgomery district was proving refractory to the refining processes the Sterling company was utilizing. With great disappointment Hugh J. Cannon confessed to his brother, Abraham, that the mill run from which officials on the scene expected to net \$8,000 had produced an ore concentrate "they had no power to melt." What this meant was that the company lacked the processing capability to retrieve a great deal of the gold it was mining. This situation was made public six months later when a local correspondent to the *Courier* reported that there was abundant rich gold exposed to view at many of the various levels in both the Johnnie and the Chispa mines and that Sterling operations would "resume work on these mines as soon as the ore can be treated successfully." It was then admitted that the reduction works installed at considerable expense had "been unable to extract the gold from the ore successfully." It was also noted that a "great deal of the gold [had] gone into the tailings" dump, a situation that could never bode well for a milling operation.<sup>19</sup> Although evidence is lacking, it is possible that the difficulties resulted from not engaging more knowledgeable mining men at an earlier juncture—either to warn investors of the complex nature of the ores or to procure the proper reduction equipment to solve that problem. Some writers have implied that the Montgomerys knew of these problems before they ever sold part of

their holdings to the outside investors.<sup>20</sup>

In the meantime the church leaders had recognized that changes in the company management had to be made. Aware that little profit had been generated since the previous May, President Wilford Woodruff, then past eighty-eight years of age, concluded early in 1896 that Sterling affairs were "badly arranged and not satisfactory." He added conclusively, "they are doing us no good."

Immediately thereafter, the company was reorganized as a syndicate, and Abraham H. Cannon, the energetic young president of the still-projected Salt Lake and Los Angeles Railroad, was designated as manager of the Sterling company as well. Joseph F. Smith, member of the First Presidency, was installed as company president. And Thomas P. Gillespie, a non-Mormon resident of Salt Lake City, was appointed superintendent of the Nevada operations. Unfortunately, this reorganization did little, if anything, to reverse the tendency of the Sterling company to lose money for its church backers. Later in the spring, Gillespie proposed to lease the property on some percentage or pro-rata basis, presumably one granting him more control over the mining and milling operations. This was accomplished in mid June, with Joseph F. Smith and Abraham H. Cannon traveling to Nevada to finalize the agreements.<sup>21</sup>

There were also efforts to resolve the most pressing problem—securing a proper method of ore refining—by the still fully active Mormon stockholders. In mid June the church newspaper reported that the company secretary, Hugh Cannon, was again heading for the mines to "make tests of a certain kind of ore-reduction machinery which the company contemplate[d] buying." And soon thereafter his brother Abraham, the new company manager, then just returned from southern Nevada and southern California, divulged to the same newspaper that the Sterling properties had "been inspected by men of highest standing and by them pronounced as being very promising." He went on to affirm "the property can be successfully and profitably worked now." The real basis for the manager's current optimism, and doubtless a factor in the church hierarchy's initial interest in the entire mining scheme, was the imminence of construction of the Salt Lake and Los Angeles Railroad. Whatever the outcome of their efforts to resolve the refractory ore problem, with the new railroad passing within forty miles of the Sterling mines, it would become eminently feasible to ship the complex high grade ore to refineries better able to retrieve the gold. Abraham Cannon spoke for all of his fellows when he stated that "our proposed railroad will make [the mining company] much more valuable."<sup>22</sup>

This being the case, the tragic death of Abraham H. Cannon at age thirty-seven just one week after publication of his optimistic newspaper interview, was one of the most devastating blows possible to the future success of the Mormon mining venture. Cannon's demise brought about the total collapse of the railroad enterprise, which until that point had been virtually assured—it

even had good prospects of backing and patronage from Japanese traders.<sup>23</sup> Hugh J. Cannon, Abraham's brother, was elected manager of the Sterling Mining and Milling Company, but here, too, prospects were never again as promising. The main reason for this was the continued precarious state of church finances. In a series of meetings with Sterling officials in the ensuing weeks, it became quite clear that the church might never achieve a sizable return from its investment. At the end of September, President Woodruff concluded in his diary, "our affairs are in a desperate condition in a temporal point of view."

Less than a month later, yet another devastating blow shook the company and its backers: the company's superintendent and lessee, Thomas Gillespie, was murdered by an unapprehended assailant. Woodruff surmised that the murderer was the "wicked man who sent [church leaders] a threatening letter demanding much money."<sup>24</sup> Since the individual locally suspected of the shooting was an illiterate Native American, for him to be responsible for the letter to Utah would mean that at least one other person was involved. More likely, the local situation best explains the Sterling superintendent's demise. Earlier, Confidence Mine investor George Montgomery had attempted to assuage the anger of the mine's locator, Bob Black, a renegade suspected of a number of murders, to whom he owed \$4,000 on the mine transaction. He offered to let Black draw supplies without charge from the company store, presumably at the Johnnie Mine. When Gillespie arrived on the scene, assigned to make the entire operation more profitable, he promptly decreed that Black was to receive no further free goods from the company. As Richard Lingenfelter, the best of the modern Death Valley vicinity historians, has observed, this "seems to have been a fatal decision." When Gillespie was shot through the head by an unseen gunman, local suspicion centered on Bob Black, whose grudge against the victim was common knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

After this additional tragedy, Sterling's mining efforts were almost negligible, although there remained some hope of profits from the California border mines, the Confidence and Mendocino, where Jeremiah Langford was still in charge. Thomas Weir, an outside mining engineer, who had previously been engaged to study the properties and recommend arrangements under which operations could be made profitable, submitted his report at this time. It was quite favorable, and the consultant stated that it would take \$12,000 to build a pipeline to deliver the water essential for the new refining process he proposed. And he estimated another \$25,000 to construct the recommended plant capable of processing 100 tons of ore per day. He expressed confidence that with these changes and the mines again in production, there would be annual profits of \$700,000 over expenses. Unfortunately, this report was delivered to company officials in the same week that they learned of Gillespie's death.<sup>26</sup> At almost any other time, in light of the major expenditures already made, an additional \$37,000 investment to assure an annual return of more than half a million would have been attractive to the good businessmen who controlled the company's

destiny. But not then.

There had simply been too many disappointments, and Woodruff's counselors probably could not bring themselves to press their honored leader further on the matter. Although the other investments they had engineered during the same period were looking better, the general condition of church finances—facing persistent bond payments on these ventures—would have been most exhausting. Judging from the numerous diary references to the Sterling mines during the last years of Wilford Woodruff's eventful life, the subject preoccupied him considerably as it doubtless did his counselors, who had clearly encouraged church involvement in a type of investment often discouraged by the previous Mormon leader, Brigham Young. The awareness that the news of the church's Sterling losses was well known must have weighed heavily on all the Latter-day Saint leaders involved and undoubtedly helped convince them to cut their losses and disengage.<sup>27</sup>

The last reported meeting of the Sterling Mining and Milling Company was on May 8, 1897. Attorney and banker John M. Cannon, cousin of Abraham and Hugh and nephew of George Q., was employed to wind up the company's affairs. Part of his task involved further borrowing to make interest payments on company loans still outstanding. While all past expenditures are not known, the church probably expended around \$200,000 during the depths of the worst depression ever to that time. While the available documentary sources on the matter are extremely sketchy, there is some indication that Thomas Kearns, a Roman Catholic mining figure and later Utah opponent of the Mormons, apparently purchased the Sterling properties for the paltry sum of \$131,869.<sup>28</sup>

After their experience with the Sterling gold mines, the church authorities would have certainly agreed with the earlier observations of the great economist, Adam Smith, that

Of all those expensive and uncertain projects . . . which bring bankruptcy upon the greater part of the people who engage in them, there is none perhaps more perfectly ruinous than the search after new silver and gold mines. It is perhaps the most disadvantageous lottery in the world, or the one in which the gain of those who draw the prizes bears the least proportion to the loss of those who draw the blanks.<sup>29</sup>

Yet paradoxically, the church was to recoup its losses from mining by drawing on another mining property—albeit a long-established and reliable one.

Wilford Woodruff died September 28, 1898, painfully aware of the exorbitant burden of debt that weighed on the church he had led for a decade. In fact, just two months earlier there had been a careful statement of the assets and liabilities in his charge as trustee-in-trust. The new church leader, Lorenzo Snow, selected through a seniority process, chose the same counselors in the First Presidency as his predecessor. Equally advanced in years, Snow took as his mission the effort to get the church on a more secure financial footing. This he attempted primarily through his well-known crusade designed to rejuve-

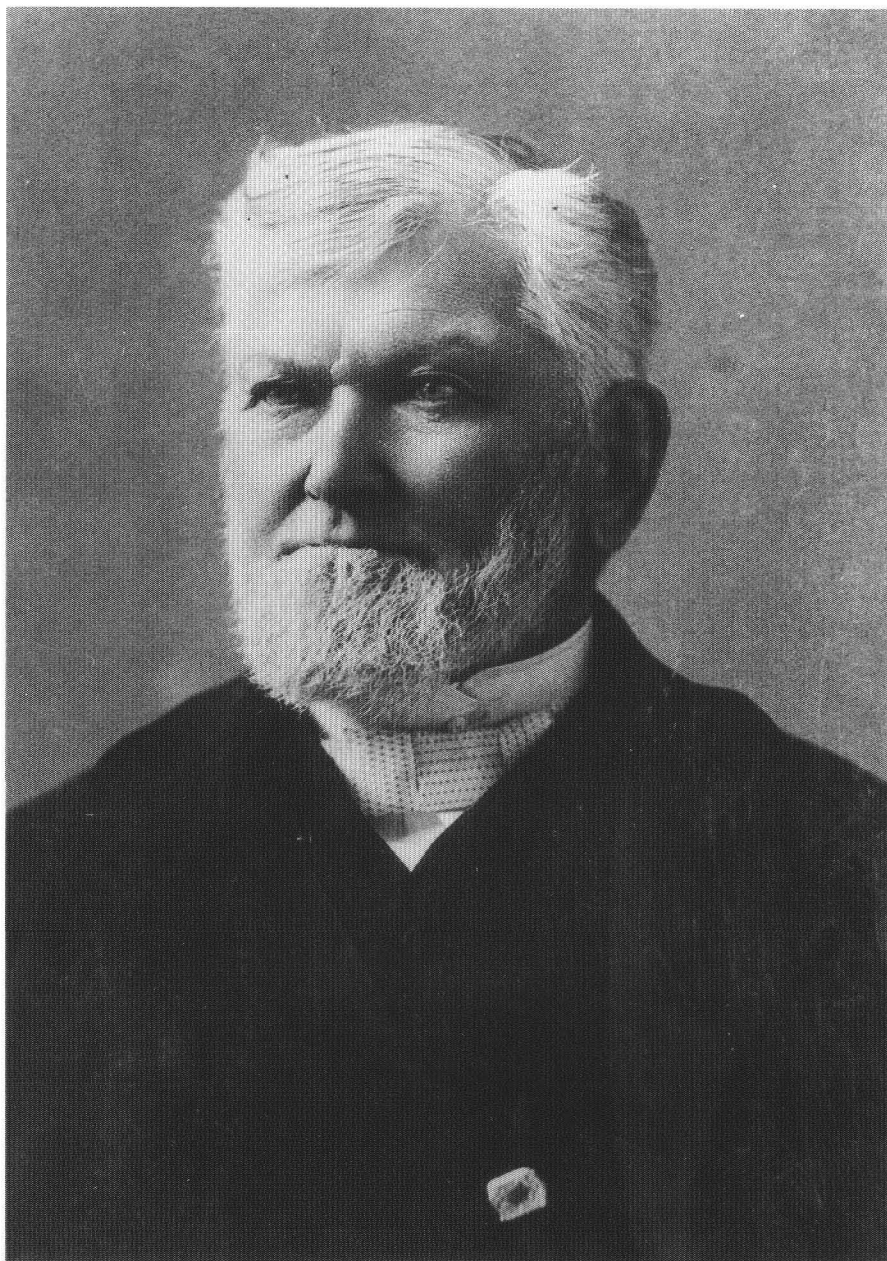
nate individual Latter-day Saints to meet their traditional tithing obligations.

On December 2, 1898, early in his tenure, President Snow met with his counselors and with Hugh J. and George M. Cannon for the purpose of "enlightening" himself "in relation to the affairs of the Sterling mine." After mentioning the period of optimism during which investors were confident of large monetary returns to replenish depleted church coffers, the record of the meeting concludes saying that "they were doomed to disappointment, however, for the mine proved a failure, and after this fact became apparent, attorney John M. Cannon was employed for the purpose of winding up its affairs." During this meeting Cannon was authorized to again borrow sufficient funds to pay the current debt due on the defunct investment.<sup>30</sup>

Some four months later, George Q. Cannon engaged in a private conversation with President Snow on the subject of some "dedicated stock" in one of Utah's most successful silver mines, the Bullion Beck of Eureka. This stock had been placed in Cannon's custody in 1887 by his uncle, John Taylor. Taylor, who had since died, had been Woodruff's predecessor as Mormon President. Cannon urged Snow to allow him to relinquish this stock, making proper accounting for its former use, so as to then utilize its remaining proceeds "for the purpose of covering the losses sustained by the church in the Sterling mine." Several days later, at a meeting of many of the highest church authorities, President Cannon explained that the proposed transfer of the dedicated Bullion Beck stock to President Snow was for the expressed purpose of "liquidating the obligation assured by [church leaders] in connection with the Sterling property." Snow thereupon expressed firm desire that the entire matter be carefully explicated and considered before any action was taken.

The history of the Bullion Beck stock was recounted, enabling those church authorities whose terms had not coincided with John Taylor's regime to grasp the complex and unique circumstance in which the president had consecrated some of the mining stock for future church purposes. Those purposes were to be decided solely by himself and, subsequently, by his nephew and counselor, George Q. Cannon. It was correctly conceded that at one point some dozen years previously, disagreements over these arrangements had threatened a disruption of the unity usually enjoyed among the Latter-day Saint hierarchy.<sup>31</sup> In the specifics of the accounting, it was stated that the 7,373 shares of Bullion Beck were worth \$10 each and that dividends accrued totaled \$159,669, along with \$20,000 interest. Some of these funds had been expended for other purposes, as fully explained by President Cannon.<sup>32</sup> Approval of the proposal to utilize the remaining money, and perhaps the stock equity, to recoup church losses and presumably to cancel remaining debts related to the Sterling company finally brought this unfortunate episode to an acceptable resolution. Although the Nevada mining properties were later to become profitable, it is unlikely that any of those Mormon church leaders regretted terminating their involvement in that frustrating venture.<sup>33</sup>





President Wilford Woodruff. (*Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, all rights reserved*)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958; rpt. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 353-79.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Leo Lyman, *Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 232-34; see also Leonard J. Arrington, "Utah and the Depression of the 1890's," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 29 (January 1961), 3-18.

<sup>3</sup>*Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2 December 1898, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; incorporation papers, Clerk of the County Court, Salt Lake City, Utah; related Sterling Mine file in L.D.S. Historical Department: First Presidency of the Church Financial Papers, formerly numbered CR 194-1. File CR 194-1 is now closed, but the authors possess extensive notes from the time when the file was open.

<sup>4</sup>Wilford Woodruff Journal, 29 April 1895; Statement of Assets and Liabilities of the Trustee-in-Trust of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, July 1898 (typescript in possession of Leonard Arrington.)

<sup>5</sup>Melvin C. Merrill, ed., *Marriner Wood Merrill and His Family* (Salt Lake City: private printing, 1937), 182, and 10 February 1906.

<sup>6</sup>Scott G. Kenney, ed. *Wilford Woodruff Journals* (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1985), vol. 9, 7 January 1894.

<sup>7</sup>Woodruff Journal, 7 January, 4, 5, 6 February, 29 April, 1, 10, 15 May, 9 July 1895; *Deseret Weekly News*, 14 September 1895, p. 405.

<sup>8</sup>Other claims mentioned in the transaction include the Freelands, Surprise, Maud R, Foust, Grapevine, California, Esmiralda, Eclectic, Bullion, and Croppy, along with several water rights including the Horse Shootum originally claimed by E. A. Montgomery, the Pilot mill site, and the Montgomery townsite.

<sup>9</sup>Nye County Miscellaneous Records, Book D, pp. 136-37, Nye County Courthouse, Tonopah, Nevada; Sally Zanjani, *Jack Longstreet: Last of the Desert Frontiersmen* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1994), 64-65. According to Zanjani, the Johnnie is the most likely candidate to have been the old Breyfogle mine.

<sup>10</sup>Woodruff Journal, 10 July 1895; Zanjani, *Longstreet*, 114-15.

<sup>11</sup>*Journal History*, 28 November, 2, 23 December 1898; Statement of Assets and Liabilities, July 1898.

<sup>12</sup>Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith to Orson Smith and J. E. Langford, 26 April 1895; Woodruff, G. Q. Cannon, and J. F. Smith to O. Smith, J. E. Langford, and Hugh J. Cannon, 2, 13 May, 2, 12 August 1895; Woodruff, G. Q. Cannon, J. F. Smith to O. Smith, 5 August 1895. All in Wilford Woodruff Papers, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>13</sup>*Salt Lake Tribune*, 10 September 1895; *Deseret Weekly News*, 14 September 1895, containing Orson Smith letter dated September 2, presumably addressed to the First Presidency and given by them to this church-owned newspaper.

<sup>14</sup>*Deseret Weekly News*, 14 September 1895; Zanjani, *Longstreet*, 66-71; *Belmont Courier*, 21 September 1895.

<sup>15</sup>*Belmont Courier*, 5 October, 26 October, 2 November 1895.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 15 February, 25 April, 30 May, 6 June 1896; Woodruff Journal, 11, 30 September, 1, 8 October, 12 November 1895; Abraham H. Cannon Journal, 12 November 1895, original in Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; statement of Assets and Liabilities, July 1898.

<sup>17</sup>Abraham H. Cannon Journal, 15 November 1895.

<sup>18</sup>*Belmont Courier*, 15 February, 25 April, 30 May 1896; A. H. Cannon Journal, 12, 15, 27, 28 November, 3, 4 December 1895.

<sup>19</sup>Abraham H. Cannon Journal, 3 December 1895; *Belmont Courier*, 6 June 1896.

<sup>20</sup>Zanjani, *Longstreet*, 65, states that in the period prior to sale to the Mormons, "a great deal of money had been squandered on an inefficient mill that recovered less than half the value in the Montgomery district's gold ores."

<sup>21</sup>Woodruff Journal, 18, 21, 22 January, 6 March, 11, 12 May 1896.

<sup>22</sup>*Deseret News*, 17 June, *Deseret Weekly News*, 11 July 1896, 113.

<sup>23</sup>Edward Leo Lyman, "From the City of the Angels to the City of the Saints: The Struggle to Build a Railroad from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City," *California History* 70:1 (Spring 1991), 82-5.

<sup>24</sup>Woodruff Journal, 27 July, 4, 5 August, 11, 14, 16, 30 September, 27 October 1896; *Los Angeles Times*, 3 November 1896, stated the ambush took place as Gillespie was driving a rig from a mine into the town of Duses. He was shot from ambush when almost opposite the Ramsey store. A witness saw him fall and ran to him. Despite the deed being perpetrated essentially in public, there was no clue as to the murderer's identity.

<sup>25</sup>Richard Lingenfelter, *Death Valley and the Amargosa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 192-94; Zanjani, *Longstreet*, 77, 109, 112-21, 136, 143.

<sup>26</sup>Summary of Weir's report, signed by J. E. Langford and dated 1 November 1896, in possession of B. T. Cannon, Salt Lake City; Report noted in author Lyman's research from First Presidency Financial Papers, now closed. Indicates Weir report is filed there.

<sup>27</sup>[Heber Bennion], *Gospel Problems*, a booklet probably first published in 1920 by a formerly prominent Mormon disenchanted over the church abandonment of plural marriage. Among his other criticisms of church authorities was their disfellowshipping of persons involved in so-called dream mines. Bennion, a brother-in-law to the then church president, Heber J. Grant, stated "what proof is there that these people [interested in such mines] are deluded or reprobate . . . The experience of the [church] authorities in some of their own ventures ought to mellow them in charity for others . . . What about the Sterling Mine in Nevada in which the authorities were involved? Was not that a dismal failure, the history of which is anything but to be proud of." See pp. 35-36.

<sup>28</sup>First Presidency, Financial Papers, formerly numbered CR 194-1 and now closed to historical research. These documents were examined over twenty years ago by E. L. Lyman, during the era in which L. J. Arrington directed the Historical Department of the church—at which time the documents were open to scholarly examination. The following comments appear in Lyman's personal notes: "church is loaning their money in '96 and '97, Sterling Mining Company must be in trouble. There are still [bond payments] going out in 1898, and then there is a complete list of the loans to the Sterling M and M Company from April 17, 1894 way on into 1897 when Tom Kearns and others do it [?] to the extent of \$131,869."

<sup>29</sup>Adam Smith, *An Enquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1940), 529-30.

<sup>30</sup>*Journal History*, 2 December 1898.

<sup>31</sup>Edward Leo Lyman, "The Alienation of an Apostle from His Quorum: The Moses Thatcher Case," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 18: 2, (Summer, 1985), 68-72.

<sup>32</sup>*Journal History*, 24, 27 April 1899.

<sup>33</sup>Stanley W. Paher, *Nevada: Ghost Towns & Mining Camps* (Berkeley: Howell North Books, 1970), 324-26, states that early in the twentieth-century the Ore City Mining Company took out some gold and copper from the Sterling mine, and a speculative townsite was laid out nearby and a post office applied for. The camp was abandoned when the boomlet ended. The Johnnie was caught up in the mining hysteria which advanced south from Goldfield and Bullfrog after 1904. The town grew to 300 persons, with a post office, several saloons, stores, hotels and a daily stage to the railroad. The mine and sixteen stamp mill operated until 1914. In the following decade, placer gold was discovered nearby and mined intermittently for three decades. In the 1930s another town of the same name sprang up a few miles away but closed during World War II. Production from the Johnnie alone is said to have exceeded a million dollars. The district was active for nearly half a century, one of the longest durations in southern Nevada history. The notorious outlaw Butch Cassidy supposedly resided near the Johnnie Mine in the late 1920s. See Richard Patterson, *Butch Cassidy: A Biography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 231-32.

## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### Boyhood Days in Winnemucca, 1901-1910

James R. Chew

Editor's Note: Early in 1998, the exhibits staff at the Nevada State Museum in Carson City added a new diorama of Winnemucca's Chinatown, as it was until it was torn down in the 1950s. The primary resource for reconstructing the historic district was the narrative and drawing by James R. Chew, done from memory in 1981, and included here.

As a young boy, my family and I lived in Winnemucca's Chinatown on Baud Street. It had a population of about 400 Chinese who were practically all railroad workers. Surprisingly, only four of the 400 were women. When the Pacific Railroad was completed, about May 10, 1869, many of the workers had to move to seek work elsewhere.

Almost all of the buildings were built of wood and consisted mainly of rough wooden 1x12's for sidings, 2x4's for framing, and battens to cover cracks. One exception was a single adobe house. Its foundation consisted of adobe blocks made from materials excavated from the very hill on which the house sat. Because of financial conditions, about half of the roofs consisted of old flattened coal-oil cans instead of wood shingles. This was most convenient as coal oil was used for all lighting purposes because of the unavailability of gas or electricity.

Ti Loy Jan, the first building on the left of the sketch, was owned by Mr. Wong Git, who dealt in herbs and Chinese staple foods. His store was also the depository of the gold dust that the Chinese brought in for safe keeping. The gold dust was measured by a small cup and not by weight. His son, Wong Jim, is playing "Kick the Feathers" with Lew Gum Fot and Wong Pon, who later owned the Gem and Crystal Cafes. The two-story building on the right of Ti Loy Jan was owned by Mr. Tom Sing Ling, who was the interpreter for the community. To the right of Tom Sing Ling is Quong Chong, a Chinese merchandising, boarding, and gambling house owned by Mr. Lee Dong Chue.

On the right of Quong Chong was a two-story boarding and gambling house built by two brothers, Ni Ngow Him and Ni Ngow Due. There is a little humor about this house. The brothers framed the first floor and nailed 1"x12"x16'

sidings to it. This left 8' of sidings without support and most of the sidings were splintered in the wind during the night. The Joss House in the center was built in 1902 to serve the community as a place of peace, worship, and celebrations. The barbecue kiln which can be seen along the side of the Joss House was used on certain holidays such as Ancestral Birthdays and Chinese Deity days. On these occasions, one whole hog or sometimes two were barbequed and a slice was offered to each person. It might be noted that Dr. Sun Yat Sen, the first president of Nationalist China, visited and spent a day in this hall in 1911.

On the right of the Joss House was an adobe house owned by Mr. Soo Hoo Wing that was used as a boarding and gambling place. On the right of Soo Hoo Wing is Wong Sing's store. Besides gambling and boarding he also dealt in fresh fish and vegetables that were shipped weekly from Tung Sung Co. of Sacramento, California, by Wells Fargo Express. He also made Chinese doughnuts and pastries on special holidays. A group of gamblers can be seen queuing from Wong Sing's to Mr. Pa Ah Jeong's house on the right to continue gambling. Each establishment was allowed to operate only one hour consecutively from house to house, which was a decree of the community elders.



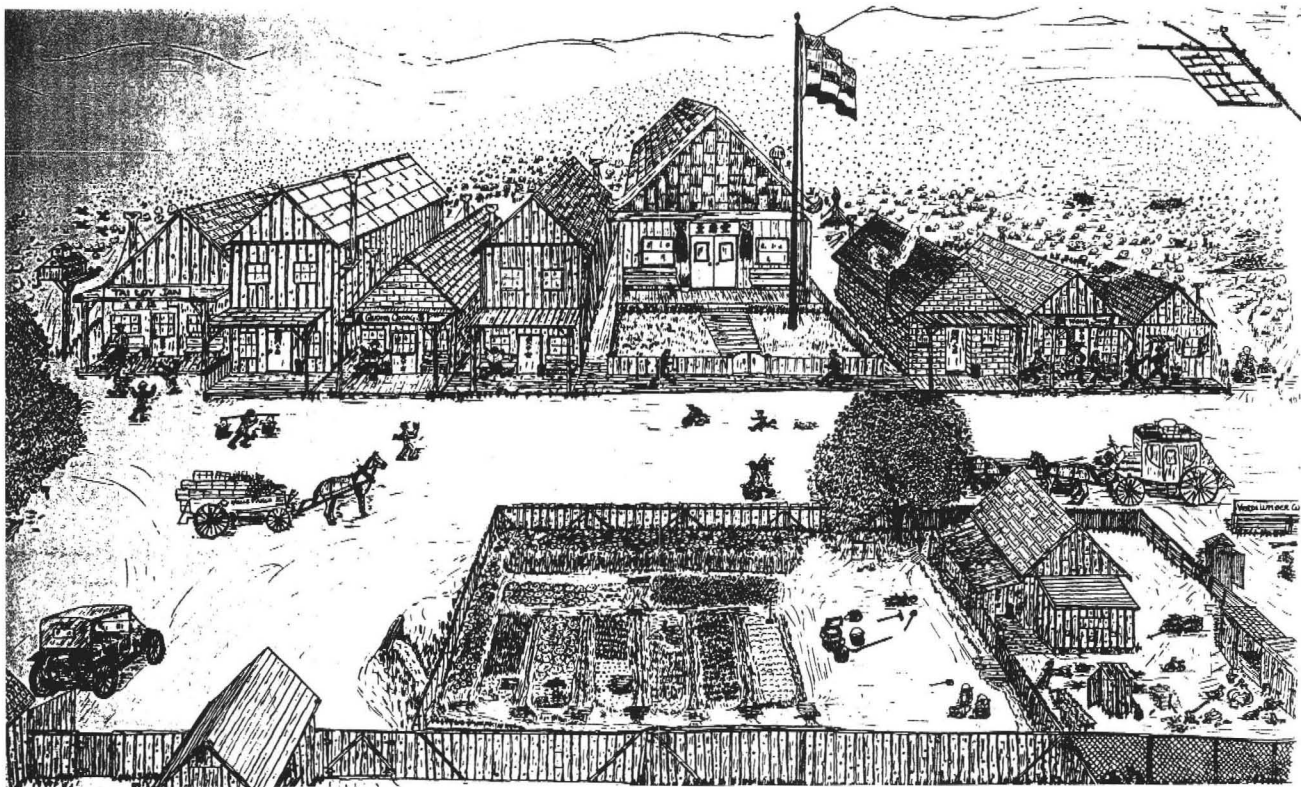
Diorama of Winnemucca's Chinatown constructed from a drawing and narrative from Mr. James R. Chew, from a photograph c. 1980, from a set of photographs taken in 1955 by Glenn's Camera Shop in Winnemucca, from a 1907 Sanborn map of Winnemucca, and from notes from Dr. Sue Fawn Chung on "Feng Shui," the Chinese art of placement, of balancing and enhancing the environment. (Photo by Scott Klette, Nevada State Museum)

Meanwhile the McDermitt-Winnemucca stage is patiently waiting in front of the Chew residence for Grandma Low, as it will take her home to McDermitt. Archie and Helen Mangan, the children of Dr. J.P. Mangan, are seen crawling through a hole in the wire fence to play with the Chew boys, who are seen racing down Baud Street. Jimmy is on the tricycle, with Frank and Rover bringing up the rear. Also Father Chew Yee is hard at work delivering his load of vegetables. He will balance the load all the way to the Lafayette Hotel for Mr. Germain's tables. After making his delivery, he might return to work in his garden or even go prospecting for gold in the nearby hills. At the same time, Mr. Lee Sum is coming from the opposite direction on his way to the boarding houses. He is bringing fresh fish that he caught in the Humboldt River and vegetables from his garden where he has been farming for years, which is on the east side of the Humboldt River near the bridge. It also seems like Mrs. Rutherford's cow is calling for attention. Mr. Charles Sheehan, the president of the First National Bank of Winnemucca, is somewhere consulting with attorney Mr. Sam Bonnifield, while his 1904 Buick is waiting for his return.

The Wells Fargo Express agent is delivering a load of fresh produce. On his wagon are 12' boxes which are bound with bamboo and filled with sugar cane. To complete his load are crates of oranges and grapefruit all of which are imported from China.

Mr. Lew Hay Sing, or better known as Lew Toy Wing, owner of Quong On Lung, brought his wife from China and raised a good-sized family after we moved. On the right of Quong On Lung was a store named Sing Kee owned by two partners, Mr. Gee Way Mon and Jeong Song. It was a curio shop dealing in oriental wares. On the right of Sing Kee were a few boarding houses, one owned by Lee Leong and the owner of the other unknown. Behind Quong On Lung, there was a row of houses. In the first house resided Lew Gum Fot and his parents; in the second, Mrs. Jennings Sing and her daughter, Ah Ping; and in the last house, Mrs. Dip Lee, the community's midwife.





Mr. James R. Chew provided future generations with a unique bird's-eye view of Winnemucca's once-thriving and extensive Chinatown drawn by him from memory in 1981. (*James R. Chew*)

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Tough Jews: Fathers, Sons, and Gangster Dreams.* By Rich Cohen. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998, 271 pp.).

Rich Cohen does not break any new ground, but he covers well-known terrain in an entertaining fashion. He looks back to a time when many Jews of Eastern European origin had not entered the mainstream of American society—to a time when young Jewish men in the ghettos were more likely to consider careers in prizefighting, bootlegging, or loan sharking rather than medicine and law. Tough Jew and then Las Vegas entrepreneur Moe Dalitz often responded to questions about his Prohibition-era rum-running across the Great Lakes and other illegal exploits of his youth with the statement, “Tough times make tough people.” It did then, and it does today.

America has a rich but imperfect tradition of ethnic succession in organized crime. Imperfect because not all the major groups of immigrants have contributed an equal proportion of their sons to supplying the goods and services which Americans both avidly seek and self-righteously make illegal. German Jews are a good example of a non-participating group, while eastern European Jews provide a fine example of participation. What is extraordinary about their participation is both its initial intensity and how quickly it passed. Because the image of the Jewish gangster passed at least as rapidly as the Jewish gangster himself, American Jews can enjoy tales of a recently bygone era without feeling their reputation is sullied by the connection.

Cohen is not the first to respond to the demand for a book like this, but he is the first to do so in a manner appealing to the average reader. He does not hesitate to attribute to an array of Jewish organized crime figures, almost all with nicknames at least as fascinating as those attributed by the media to more contemporary Italian-American organized crime leaders, a variety of thoughts and words as they face the many challenges of daily life outside the law. While this will not endear him to scholars, it does make for good reading because the characters come alive. Rather than merely recount that on March 4, 1944, two murderers of eastern European Jewish origin, Louis Lepke [Buchalter] and Mendy Weiss, and one of southern Italian background, Louis Capone, were strapped into the electric chair at Sing Sing, Cohen ascribes to the first two thoughts and feelings based on their minimal identification with Judaism. He does this throughout the book, and he does it effectively. Why not? Few scholars would deny that both readers and listeners are far more likely to remember

a good story with a human interest angle than a dispassionate analysis of this or that topic, even if delivered in a Power Point presentation.

Cohen is so focused on characters from the Brownsville and Bensonhurst neighborhoods of Brooklyn that *Tough Jews in New York City* would have been a more informative title. He draws liberally, quite liberally, from biographies of Meyer Lansky and Arnold Rothstein as well as from Albert Fried's *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), and from interviews with law enforcement professionals, most of whom had no contact with the men whose lives he describes. Yet, in some respects, the strength of the book, even beyond the author's imagination, is Cohen's interweaving in the narrative many of the stories he heard from his father and his father's contemporaries at Nat 'n' Al's Deli in Beverly Hills. Fact or fiction, these stories take the reader back to the second quarter of this century, when even those New York City Jewish adolescents who would eventually go on to professional business careers sometimes dreamed of leading the gangster life. Indeed, in addition to the expected pictures of Jewish tough guys, interspersed with standard mug shots of their Italian counterparts, Cohen has included not only a picture of his father and his adolescent friends in Bensonhurst posing as young toughs, but also a photograph of himself as an adolescent dressed like Ben Siegel.

Cohen has drawn well upon secondary sources, oral tradition, and imagination to provide the reader, particularly if he or she grew up in an inner-city neighborhood in the 1920s or 1930s, with a look back to the way it was.

Alan Balboni

*Community College of Southern Nevada*

*In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990.*

By Quintard Taylor. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998, 415, pp., ill).

Quintard Taylor's *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West. 1528-1990* presents a detailed account of Blacks in the development of the frontier. Taylor tells us that the history of Blacks in the West began long before the great migration from the Deep South in the early 1930s. Indeed, since the days of Estebande Dorantes, the Spanish-speaking slave who may have been the first black man to see the great western plains in the 1500s, to the discovery of a path across the Sierra Nevada to California in the 1850s by James

Beckwourth, Black Americans were intimately involved in exploring the American West.

Scholars of Black history have been slow to recognize such truths. However, the rich history of Blacks in the West does not entirely reflect the early history of Blacks in the United States, in that African Americans were not necessarily forced upon the land. Blacks arrived as free men and women, as servants, and as slaves. Nevertheless, the lives of African Americans in the West have been inaccurately portrayed. Perhaps such stereotypes, as Taylor has pointed out, were fed by the racist views of whites who arrived at the same time.

Nonetheless, African Americans settling in the West started out like their white counterparts—that is, they were farmers, pioneers, fortune-seekers and adventurers. In essence, as Taylor suggests, Blacks shared the experiences of journeying to an unknown land to escape—to escape slavery and sharecropping, segregation, and the general brutality of living in the Deep South—while always seeking a better life. Hence, African Americans participated not only in the early settlement of the West, but also in its subsequent development.

Taylor also briefly investigates slavery and white slave owners, especially in Texas, where the peculiar institution was surprisingly virulent. In fact, Black slaves living in Texas did not learn of emancipation until two months after the Civil War ended, because slaveowners wanted them to bring in the final crops that year. Unfortunately, Taylor writes vaguely about Black cowboys. With the exception of Nat Love (better known as Deadwood Dick), or the famous bronco rider and inventor of “bulldogging,” Bill Pickett, they remain relatively anonymous. But he does make the important point that Black soldiers and cowboys were “the first African American western historical figures to capture [the public’s] attention,” and imagination.

Furthermore, the United States military, according to Taylor, played a crucial part in the growth of Blacks in the West. Black troops, known as buffalo soldiers by Native Americans and others, were stationed at many of the army’s western outposts. Black troops (the 9th Cavalry in particular) and their families became a substantial population, much to the chagrin, perhaps, of the white population, who feared Black male soldiers would run rampant and rape white women. Such fears, however, proved unwarranted. Many Black troops became “larger than life” heroes of the West and Congressional Medal of Honor winners. However, Black frontier troops suffered many trials and tribulations and indignities. And this unfair treatment of Black American soldiers in the West continued during the Spanish American War, World War I and World War II.

Taylor also informs us that the growing railroad system in the West became an important employer not only of Asian immigrants, but of Blacks, especially in the menial but highly-prized jobs of porters, cooks and waiters. Still, Blacks faced and endured overt discrimination in the West in these occupations, which became a microcosm of what happened to African Americans throughout the United States at the time. In other words, white supremacy also reigned in the

frontier West.

Another aim of Taylor's book is to give a detailed analysis of the contributions made by Blacks in the West, and a thorough literature review. Unfortunately, Taylor falls short in presenting all of the fascinating secondary sources. For example, he only briefly mentions the first noteworthy Black rancher, Ben Palmer, stating that he became "one of the heaviest tax-payers of Douglas County, Nevada." But Palmer was much more. According to Ed Johnson and Elmer R. Rusco, writing in 1989 in *Nevada Magazine*, Ben Palmer also became a "skilled and determined" landowner and a "busy cattleman." The great mystery is how Palmer was able to achieve so much as a Black man who could neither read nor write, competing in a white man's business (or world). This oversight on Taylor's part, however, is forgivable, because this substantial study is an excellent first effort, offering valuable insight into the key events and varied experiences of Blacks living in the West.

The book's most compelling discussion takes place in the chapters addressing the civil rights movement from the 1940s through the 1970s. Late in the nineteenth century, Blacks were excluded from participating politically and socially in the established governments of the western states. However, as the Black population grew in states like Nevada and California, they gained political clout. Slowly, Blacks began to participate in various state governing systems, making significant strides in education, politics and business.

Equally important, as Taylor asserts, the migration of Blacks and their increase in population "strengthened civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP, and encouraged anti-discrimination legislation in a number of western states." For example, writes Taylor, "Washington, Oregon, New Mexico, and California all passed state fair employment practices statutes between 1949 and 1959, prefiguring the 1964 Civil Rights Act."

Nonetheless, African Americans were still routinely discriminated against in almost every aspect of their lives. But they survived despite overwhelming odds. The legacy of Blacks in the West is filled with social and political intrigue, as one will no doubt gather after reading Taylor's book. However, this amazing history is almost unknown to most Americans, as Taylor avidly explains.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of *In Search of the Racial Frontier* is the last chapter, where Taylor makes a cursory and feeble attempt to explain the past history of Blacks in the West in light of today's social and political climate, and relate it to the future. Although the connections are not always clear and direct, Taylor nevertheless makes the right argument that African Americans will always be a part of the West. In the final analysis, this seminal work fills an important niche in the study of African Americans in the West.

Earnest N. Bracey

*Community College of Southern Nevada*

*On the Boulevard: The Best of John L. Smith.* By John L. Smith. (Las Vegas: Huntington Press, 1999, 315 pp.).

Red Smith, the Pulitzer Prize-winning sportswriter whose columns entered the realm of literature, once said in justification of publishing a collection of his daily work that today's newspaper wraps tomorrow's mackerel. Gathering columns between hard or soft covers was a way to give them a longer shelf life and possibly to contribute to the historical record. *On the Boulevard* is a collection of columns that does that—and much more.

John L. Smith's columns have appeared four or five times a week on the front local page of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* since 1986. That is a staggering output: about 2,000 columns, or somewhere in the range of 200,000 words. From these, Smith and his publisher have selected nearly 125 of his best and most interesting stuff, on subjects ranging from prominent politicians to little-known Las Vegans leading happy or quietly desperate lives. For the reader, that is good news: While Smith writes analytically and well on politics, and tosses in a few pieces on that subject, collections of political columns traditionally are harder to read or sell because the people and issues involved are far more ephemeral. "All things considered, I prefer the dinosaur mobsters to the corporate casino bosses, the Thunderbird drinkers to the Dam Perignon sippers, the blackjack dealers to the puffed-up politicians. I'll take the angels in the alley over the thieves in the temple any day," Smith writes, and this collection reflects that credo (p. 2).

The book is divided into six sections. "Everyday People" relates tales ranging from the one about the restaurant where civic leaders met daily to cut meat and deals, to another about an honest taxi driver whose decision to return a high-rolling gambler's wallet netted him a week as the gambler's guest—and Smith an appearance in *Reader's Digest*. "Boomtown Blues" addresses important Las Vegas issues, from the need to preserve Big Springs, the site where John C. Frémont stopped in 1844, to the First Amendment debate created by local efforts to limit the advertising of Las Vegas sex clubs. Other chapters reveal bureaucratic snafus, the criminal and not-so-criminal element, sports figures, and Smith himself, talking about his family and friends.

A book like this is not meant to be digested at one sitting. Not only does the subject matter obviously vary from column to column, but good newspaper style demands the kind of short and punchy writing that Smith does so well—and needs to be taken in doses, not continuously. It is not a collection of scholarly articles, nor is it meant to be.

However, none of this diminishes the value and importance of *On the Boulevard*. For one thing, anyone who wants to understand the Las Vegas that was and the Las Vegas that is needs to read this book. It offers an insight into the texture of the community that many historians—and many of Smith's fellow



journalists—lack. No city has grown faster than Las Vegas: Since the auction that founded it in 1905, the metropolitan area has reached a population of about 1.3 million. Nor has any other city been founded so completely on one industry, gambling and tourism. They are the kind of industry and city that attracts characters, and no one is better than Smith at capturing them and their essence.

It also is valuable for understanding Smith. As the author of what is probably the most popular feature in Las Vegas's main daily newspaper, and of controversial books about controversial people—resort magnates Steve Wynn and Bob Stupak—Smith is an important figure himself. This book is a window through which to look not only at Las Vegas, but at its finest journalistic chronicler. Historian Richard Hofstadter once wrote that essay collections "are at least in their style of thought and their concerns, unified by some underlying intellectual intent . . . a set of related concerns and methods." John L. Smith's writings show his intent, concern, and methods. They are the sort that more journalists should practice: an interest in his subjects and their stories, and the desire to tell those stories in vivid and readable prose. These columns will be interesting to those who are interested in them—and to those who enjoy reading a good writer telling good stories.

Michael Green  
*Community College of Southern Nevada*

*Red Blood and Black Ink: Journalism in the Old West.* By David Dary. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998, xiv, 277 pp., ill.).

The scholarship of David Dary is impeccable. He seems to have read everything and researched everything pertaining to journalism in the Old West. His book is a fine addition to western newspaper literature. Moreover, it is a good read: clear and crisp. He is not afflicted with the sin of so many academics: muddy writing. This is no surprise. Dary, director of the journalism school at the University of Oklahoma, is a former broadcast and print journalist.

The book's most exciting chapters inevitably are the ones relating tales of rugged western newspapering. Editors often packed pistols—and used them. Gun fights and duels were frequent. The murderers were often acquitted.

A few chapters, while necessary historically, are slow-going, like the one on "Making a Living." The opening chapters, too, tend to be less than thrilling. But once Dary gathers steam, the book is full of anecdotes and quotations that are hard to resist: the touching story of a Mexican woman, a "ministering angel" bringing food and water to the wounded, killed on a Mexican War battlefield; the tale of a man-eating prospector with echoes of the Donner Party; an

anti-goosing ordinance published in a Kansas newspaper in 1911.

So much else here is of interest, such as, stories of editors who were nonchalant about local news—The *Missouri Gazette* did not cover a Missouri earthquake in 1811 until one month later. There were western editors who, as the verse had it, could not “survive without scissors.” The author includes the clichés that western editors spouted constantly, such as: “blushing bride,” “checked career,” “city fathers,” “cool as a cucumber,” “crying need,” “Dan Cupid,” and a “good time was had by all.”

Nevada newspaper buffs will find here the familiar names of Mark Twain, Dan De Quille, Wells Drury, Joe Goodman, and Alf Doten. They will revel again in their stories, and the anecdotes told about them. In their cases, familiarity hardly breeds contempt.

This reviewer once had a managing editor who fatuously said that “reporters were a dime a dozen.” William Rockhill Nelson, editor of the *Kansas City Evening Star*, knew better. As quoted by Dary, Nelson said: “The reporter is the essential man on the newspaper . . . we could get on pretty well without our various sorts of editors. But we should go to smash if we had no reporters.”

One flaw in the book is the tendency to run the indented excerpts too long. For example, the quoted account of the killing of Jesse James in 1882 is excessive. The tribute of William Allen White to his daughter, Mary, while justly celebrated, runs to three and one-half pages, and White’s original in the *Emporia Gazette* of Kansas already has been reprinted. Another minor shortcoming is showing too much of the author’s research. Example: “The first paper in the Kansas Territory opposed to slavery” followed a couple of paragraphs later by “the second free-state paper,” and then “the third free-state paper in Kansas Territory . . .”

Also troubling are the all-too-brief accounts of such important western newspapers as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Dary is far too kind to the slanted journalism and violent anti-unionism of the *Times* under Harry Chandler. The great Joseph Pulitzer is barely mentioned. Yes, both papers and both men have been much written about. But it would have been better to leave them out rather than treat them superficially.

Dary, who took printing courses in high school and learned to set type and run presses, loves the printing trade as Ben Franklin and William Lloyd Garrison did. He has three useful appendices: one on Old West printing equipment, another on a glossary of printers’ terms, and a third giving a rundown of early newspapers in the states and territories west of the Mississippi. His preface, too, gives the reality behind the dream metropolitan reporters often have of running a weekly. Ah, freedom to write what they please at a leisurely pace. But if they follow that dream, they become free to work 80 hours a week while doing some of the most menial tasks.

Finally, Dary’s book fulfills the promise of his dedication: “To the memory of those nineteenth-century Western newspaper editors who used no weasel

words in speaking their minds." The vitriol, the billingsgate of western editors, is always wonderful to read—especially since newspapers today are so bland, offending no one in the name of the bottom line.

Jake Highton  
*University of Nevada, Reno*

*Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination.* By Michael Allen. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1998, xiii + 270 pp. notes, glossary, bibliographical essay, index).

Rodeo fans will be delighted with this study of the rodeo cowboy and his persistent presence in American popular culture. That alone would suffice to make it a healthy seller, but the appeal of this book is much broader than that. While he defines his book as a history of the rodeo cowboy in popular culture, Allen uses rodeo as an avenue to analyze the broad appeal of western Americana. Anyone who appreciates the history, myths, literature, or folklore of the West will find a treasure trove of material in Michael Allen's thoughtful analysis of rodeo-related popular culture.

Allen sets the scene for this work with a brief review of scholarly treatments of the rodeo and its participants, which leads to a rationale for the study. Allen then methodically, comprehensively, and entertainingly examines in each of seven chapters a variety of popular culture forms that deal with rodeo. In chapter one he relates the history of rodeo as a folk-based popular entertainment, including, for comparison purposes, the Wild West Show, never to be confused with real rodeo! He spends a great deal of time on the question whether rodeo cowboys are "real" cowboys, important quite likely to rodeo riders but essentially inconsequential, Allen concludes, in terms of the place rodeo cowboys have in the public imagination. He then turns his attention to films and television shows that have embraced the rodeo, remarking that rodeo belongs to a new genre, the urban or contemporary western. Films included in this study range from what he considers a rodeo classic, *The Lusty Men* (1952) to such unexpected films as *The Electric Horseman* (1979) and *Urban Cowboy* (1980) to recent films such as *8 Seconds* (1994) and *The Cowboy Way* (1994). Folklore and literature are the topics of chapter three, which includes published rodeo reminiscences, novels, and cowboy poetry. The next chapter looks at the rodeo motif in art, with attention to traditional forms as well as such topics as the rodeo poster and rodeo clothing. When studying the presence of rodeo themes in music, he begins with the origin of cowboy music in the folk songs and

poetry of America cowboys, then brings to our attention contemporary artists, particularly Chris LeDoux, Garth Brooks, Reba McIntyre (former barrel racer), and George Strait. The chapter intriguingly titled "Rainbow Rodeo Riders and the Archetypal Archetype," addresses an array of nontraditional rodeo types and themes, including that of the hippie counterculture, the prison rodeo, gay cowboys, women rodeo riders, and Mexican, Black, and Indian cowboys. Finally, in chapter seven, Allen brings the evidence together to address the question of why rodeo, and in the larger context, interest in western America, has maintained its appeal.

Allen is concerned with "the continuous presence of rodeo cowboys in modern North American popular culture," asserting that he has "appeared for so long and in so many popular art forms that we must pay attention to him." He offers little new to account for the popularity, however, but brings together some current theories, including, from the field of psychology, mythologization as a method for reducing cognitive dissonance, in this case, the dissonance that occurs when modern technological man finds his values to be rooted in his agricultural past, or, as Allen puts it, "the clash between the embrace of modernity and a yearning for the past." For Allen, the appeal of the rodeo rider as a contemporary popular cultural hero is that he epitomizes American qualities as defined by Frederick Jackson Turner over a century ago.

This book is the first to specifically study the rodeo cowboy separately from other forms of western heroes. This western hero of popular culture stands apart because he is a twentieth-century figure embodying nineteenth century traits, or, as the author notes, he is a contemporary ancestor. From this can be drawn many provocative and startling examples of how this nineteenth-century figure has adapted to and even in some cases incorporated the twentieth-century, and how nineteenth-century values are conveyed by twentieth-century technology. The image of the rodeo rider flying from one rodeo to another on a jet plane is one such example.

Finding his sources in areas both traditional and nontraditional, Allen has brought them all together to create an enlightening and enjoyable study of the ways in which rodeo is present in American culture. While the book offers little new in the way of analysis, it is valuable for isolating and examining the figure of the rodeo cowboy and studying the variety of ways in which rodeo has made its presence felt in mainstream American culture.

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*Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act.* By Andrew Gyory. (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998, xii + 354 pp., ill.).

As the first federal law banning a group of immigrants solely on the basis of race or nationality, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 has been a subject of scholarly inquiry for a century. Attempting to explain the driving forces behind the act, scholars have offered a number of theses, including the impact of local politics in California, racist culture, and political lobbying by labor unions. For Andrew Gyory, none of these explanations is fully convincing. What has been missed is the core question: how and why the anti-Chinese issue found its way from the streets of San Francisco to the nation's capital in 1882. In his *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act*, Gyory sets himself the challenge of finding the answer.

In this exhaustively researched and well-written study, Gyory documents the major political and legal developments, at both the national and local levels, regarding the issue of Chinese immigration from 1860 to 1882. His main argument can be briefly summarized: The "motive force" behind the Chinese Exclusion Act was the national politicians who "seized and manipulated the issue" in order to gain votes from both the working class voters and the western states (p. 1). By national politicians, Gyory means the leaders of the major political parties, particularly the Republicans.

To substantiate his thesis, Gyory identifies several historical moments that he believes to have crucially shaped and transformed anti-Chinese sentiment in the West into a national policy. The first moment was the congressional debate, in 1869-70, over the nation's immigration laws, the first time that "outbursts of anti-Chinese rhetoric" were allowed in Congress. What is significant about this early event was the split in the Republican party over the Chinese issue. Such radical Republicans as George Williams of Oregon endorsed the banning of Chinese immigration, while other Republicans, like William M. Stewart of Nevada and Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, defended the right of Chinese individuals to migrate freely and voluntarily to the United States. Republicans were fighting to establish political equality for the freedmen in the South, but the Chinese provided a different sort of debate.

The second moment came with the presidential campaign of 1876. With the decline of Reconstruction and radicalism, the intensification of labor strife after the economic depression of 1873, and the recapturing of the House of Representatives by Democrats in 1875, party politics in 1876 was characterized by a stalemate between the Republican and Democratic parties, which forced politicians from both parties to look for issues that would bring them additional votes. Under such circumstances, the anti-Chinese issue, which had long been a local matter, was recognized by both parties as politically exploitable and profitable, and thus began to enter the mainstream of politics.

The next vital moment was the passage of the Fifteen Passenger Bill, which limited the number of Chinese brought into the U.S. from the sea to fifteen persons per vessel, in 1879. It was during this debate that James Blaine, a major Republican leader from the East, openly supported the Chinese exclusion policy and effectively turned anti-Chinese sentiment—originally and largely uttered by local political leaders like Denis Kearney in California—into “a legitimate battle cry” for the Republican party (p. 168). Blaine’s motivation for doing so was, among other things, to attract California voters to support his presidential ambitions in 1880. Blaine lost his bid to dark-horse candidate James A. Garfield of Ohio at the 1880 Republican convention—which thus constituted another crucial moment—but his western supporters succeeded in forcing the party to formally adopt the policy “to limit and restrict” Chinese immigration, which subsequently set the tone on this issue for the Garfield (and, soon, Chester A. Arthur) administration (p. 188).

The final moment materialized when the Senate, in early 1881, ratified the Angell Treaty, which revised the original Burlingame Treaty of 1868 by allowing the U.S. to unilaterally regulate or suspend Chinese immigration. By this time, Gyory argues, only a handful of Republicans (most notably, Sumner’s protégé, George Frisbie Hoar) had remained firm and true to the egalitarian ideology upheld by the party earlier in Reconstruction. By contrast, a majority of the party had decided either to support or to tolerate Chinese exclusion, which was legalized in May 1882.

It might be Gyory’s intention to challenge other existing explanations, but I tend to value his study not as an antithesis to those theses, but rather as an original contribution to an important aspect of the history of the Chinese Exclusion Act that had been previously neglected. Where I find the Gyory study particularly valuable is that it presents a nearly perfect case study by which we learn not only the nature and workings of American party politics in the late nineteenth century, but also the limits of American freedom and democracy.

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## IN MEMORIAM

### Leonard J. Arrington Western Historian

Leonard J. Arrington, who died this past February, is considered by many experts as the "single most important historian of Utah and the Mormons." Trained as an economist, his research in the years just after his military service in postwar Italy led to *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900*, published in 1958. This has long been regarded as a classic, although it largely slighted the rest of the basin other than Utah. There are only a few peripheral references to Nevada.

Arrington subsequently wrote many books and even more journal articles. These are notable for striking a middle ground between the critics and the defenders of Mormonism. One of his best known works was *Brigham Young: An American Moses*, published in 1986. This has been termed by Professor Ronald W. Walker, "a historian's biography." But perhaps his most important contribution as an historian was in his self-described role as an "historical entrepreneur." In this, particularly during his tenure as Latter-day Saints church historian in the 1970s, he was in the "business" of encouraging a broad range of historical scholarship. Besides promoting numerous projects by the professionally-trained staff he assembled he found ways to encourage a great number of other scholars, particularly younger people including a rather large number with whom he co-authored articles. He was in the forefront of commitment to nurturing projects in women's history, the history of common people and biography. When the present writer published his first book in 1986, Arrington wrote the foreword essay and I penned the following acknowledgment:

... to Leonard Arrington, I owe a great debt of gratitude for offering me the initial opportunity to probe the holdings of the church archives and for the constant nurturing of a whole generation of budding historians of Mormonism and other subjects, among whom I am honored to be numbered.

Some, including the former editor of *Western Historical Quarterly*, Charles S. Peterson, have asserted the history Arrington wrote and promoted was too much about the Mormons and for the Mormons to be truly great. While there is some truth in this, Leonard always had an interest in subjects on the periphery of Mormon history, if not entirely away from it. The article he wrote on the

Sterling gold mine published in this issue of *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, which I revised sufficiently to claim coauthorship, is a case in point. He gathered the notes for the piece while researching *Great Basin Kingdom* and always had an interest in the subject, even though it does not present all church leaders involved during the crucial decade of the 1890's in a favorable light so far as business judgement was concerned. He liked the final draft of the article and looked forward to its publication.

It now appears that many trained in the so-called "New Mormon History" are branching out beyond the more narrow confines of L. D. S. church history into subjects closer to the mainstream of American history. Leonard would be proud of this. He will be greatly missed.

Edward Leo Lyman

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