

Nevada

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John B. Reid
Editor-in-Chief

Hillary Velázquez
& Frank Ozaki
Production & Design

Juliet S. Pierson
Manuscript Editor

Joyce M. Cox
Proofreader

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Contents

108 Editor's Note

112 "Flies Millions Thick"
Diary of Jeanne Wier's Collecting Trip
to Southern Nevada, July-August 1908

SU KIM CHUNG

151 The Piper Brothers' Business of Amusements:
Piper's Corner Bar

CAROLYN GRATTAN EICHIN

167 Disaster in the Workplace
The Las Vegas MGM Grand Hotel Fire of 1980

JAMES P. KRAFT

Front Cover: Piper's Opera House, Virginia City, ca. 1900. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

Editor's Note

August 18, 1908, was a particularly difficult day for Jeanne Elizabeth Wier. She was one month into a trip to southern Nevada to acquire historical materials for the fledgling Nevada Historical Society. The trip had been challenging; she had encountered oppressive heat, subprime accommodations, the occasional drunk neighbor, and, on more than one occasion, “flies millions thick.” In Goldfield on that day, however, she faced another type of challenge. Nevada was in the midst of its second great mining boom, and Goldfield was nearing its peak production. Seeking back issues of newspapers, Wier entered the offices of the *Goldfield Tribune* to see its manager, J. M. Burnell. Although polite, Burnell told her that she “was crazy to spend time for the State.” In Goldfield in 1908, Wier wrote in her diary, “People [were] too crazy after gold to care much for history.”

How familiar this seems! Nevada’s live-for-today attitude, while bringing a sense of progress and vibrancy to the state, has often come at the cost of honoring its history (a fact to which anyone involved in historic preservation in Nevada can attest). Thankfully, Wier persevered and continued to gather and save Nevada’s historical legacy. It was on this trip that she secured the crown jewel of the Nevada Historical Society’s collection: the William Morris Stewart papers. “What a treasure we have obtained here!” she wrote. “I can scarcely believe it is really ours.”

I begin this note with Wier’s travels because in this issue Su Kim Chung’s “‘Flies Millions Thick’—Diary of Jeanne Wier’s Collecting Trip to Southern Nevada, July-August 1908” provides a detailed annotation of Wier’s diary entries from the first two months of this trip. Wier’s diary—a diary she never intended to publish—contains vivid descriptions of Nevada in these early days. For instance, as she arrives in Las Vegas with the temperature at 100 degrees, she quips, “The only hotel I desired to see was a cold storage warehouse near the Station...” In St. Thomas (a townsite now submerged under Lake Mead), she noted the heat was “unbearable” and that she “would pay \$5 to-night for a drink of cold water. My face and body are covered with prickly heat.”

Besides the heat, a woman traveling alone in 1908 faced additional challenges. On one night in Nelson, Nevada, as she bedded down in the only available place—a tent behind the saloon—she did not sleep because “about a dozen men are on a drunk” nearby and “the air was hideous with oaths, vile language and song. I have seldom been worse frightened.” In Crescent, she heard a phonograph furnishing music for a dance for the first time, but the next morning her “Toilet had to be made beside the front door where passers by [*sic*] as well as lodgers passing could gaze on the operation.”

Wier's travel journal reminds us, too, of the boom-and-bust pattern that has characterized Nevada history. She was traveling at the height of Nevada's second mining boom, a boom that reignited an industry that had been in the doldrums since the Comstock's 1869-79 peak.¹ By 1908, the year of Wier's trip, Nevada's mining rebirth was well underway. Goldfield alone produced \$4.3 million of mineral wealth on its way to a crest of \$10.7 million for the year of 1910.² Rhyolite, on the other hand, was past its peak and "quiet" when she passed through in 1908. Meanwhile, the production of the Comstock by 1899 had fallen all the way to \$205,000, and Virginia's City's population was only 2,695 in the 1900 census.³ As Wier embarked on this research trip, she stood astride the death of the nineteenth-century Nevada and the birth of the new twentieth-century state.

Although it is not mentioned in the diary excerpt included in this issue, one relic of Nevada's nineteenth-century past was certainly known to Wier: Piper's Opera House in Virginia City. Piper's was the product of Nevada's first boom period—the Comstock—and had just closed one year before Wier's 1908 trip. A remarkable structure, the opera house that stands today is one of Virginia City's most popular attractions. Lesser known, and less visible (though recently brought back to life), is the Piper family's Old Corner Bar, the first of the Piper businesses. In this issue, Carolyn Eichine's "The Piper Brothers' Business of Amusements: Piper's Corner Bar" expands our understanding of the Pipers and the business climate of the Comstock as a whole. In this article, Eichine places the various Piper brothers' business operations within the larger context of the immigrant family-run business experience of the nineteenth century. The Pipers were German immigrants, and the Germans dominated the saloon and barkeeping trade in the West. The Comstock was no different—more German-born Comstock residents worked in saloons in 1870 than Irish-born, despite the Germans being outnumbered by the Irish nearly four to one.⁴ In so doing, Eichine reminds us that a multitude of working people operate Nevada's houses of entertainment.

James P. Kraft's "Disaster in the Workplace: The MGM Grand Hotel Fire of 1980" provides an even more illustrative example of this fact. Kraft frames this tragic event in terms of its impact on the thousands of working people affected. In addition to the nine employees killed in the fire, at least forty-five hundred were put out of work, and this was in the midst of the 1980 economic recession. Two factors compounded the strain on MGM workers. First, Nevada labor unions had little or no disaster funds (only modest strike funds were available). Second, the state did not include tip income in its calculation of unemployment benefits. For many MGM workers, this meant their compensation amounted to less than 50 percent of their pre-fire paychecks. Fortunately, the story has a somewhat happy ending—about three-fourths of the pre-fire workforce returned to the MGM when it reopened eight months after the fire. In addition, the fire had the beneficial effect of encouraging the Nevada Legislature to pass the Nevada Fire Safety Act of 1981, and it inspired

a nationwide movement to improve fire safety in high-rise buildings. Even though the Las Vegas tourism industry experienced a rare period of stability through the 1980s, its expansion through the 1990s and 2000s has exceeded even the expectations of the most optimistic booster in 1981. And while our recent experience reminds us of the tourism industry's susceptibility to economic downturns, Las Vegas and Nevada seem to be on the rebound once again.

Like Nevada itself, the *Quarterly* is rebounding from our recent setback. This is the our second issue back, and the credit for its content again goes to the work of Michael Green, Hillary Velázquez, Frank Ozaki, and SherylN Hayes-Zorn. And, of course, the credit for everything we do at the Nevada Historical Society must ultimately go to Jeanne Elizabeth Wier herself. It is difficult to imagine the NHS as it exists without her singular dedication to making it a reality. And as I write this note on a hot midsummer day in Nevada—in, I should add, an air conditioned office with no flies swarming—I keep returning to a passage from the Wier diary excerpted in this issue:

Truly the scenery here is magnificent. Cloud-burst[s] up the can[y]ons have filled the banks with a torrent of muddy but sparkling water. I sit here and try to realize that this is the same river where of yore the Spanish Fathers explored and taught. What fairylike stories are associated with this river and this can[y]on[?] All the morning hours we talked of the past: of the Indians, the Spanish, the miners of more recent years.

More than a hundred years after its writing, I feel a sense of connection to Wier here. Does this not express the sentiments of all us who love the study of the past, and of Nevada's past in particular? It evokes Nevada's striking geography whose contrasts seem to emphasize its uniqueness. She references Nevada's beautiful but (still) formidable and challenging terrain. Most important, like so many of us, she expresses a sense of curiosity and wonder about the past. I hope you, too, take a moment to gaze at Nevada's remarkable scenery and to see it through the eyes of the many who observed the same scene. What did they think? Did they sometimes see it as Frances Fuller Victor described it in her 1869 poem, "Nevada"?

Nevada—desert, waste,
Mighty, and inhospitable, and stern;
Hiding a meaning over which we yearn
 In eager, panting haste
 Grasping and losing,
Still being deluded ever by our choosing—⁵

John B. Reid
Editor-in-Chief

NOTES

¹The average yield during the Comstock period was more than \$30 million per year. In 1901, the mining yield for the entire state of Nevada was \$2.7 million. Russell Elliott, *History of Nevada*, 2 ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 406.

²Elliott, *History of Nevada*, 406.

³Grant H. Smith, *The History of the Comstock Lode, 1850-1997* (Reno: Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology, in association with the University of Nevada Press, 1998), 286.

⁴The 1870 census shows 2,160 Irish-born residents of the Comstock versus 578 from the European areas that later became known as Germany. Ronald M. James, *The Roar and the Silence: A History of Virginia City and the Comstock Lode* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1998), 95.

⁵John B. Reid and Ronald M. James, eds., *Uncovering Nevada's Past: A Primary Source Reader in Nevada History* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004), 67.

“Flies Millions Thick”
Diary of Jeanne Wier’s Collecting Trip
to Southern Nevada, July-August 1908

SU KIM CHUNG

Those of us who work as archivists for a living are used to going that extra mile to acquire collections for our repositories. Whether it involves packing up boxes in questionable environments, lifting heavy boxes until our arms ache, or loading up trucks and vans (or, more often, our own cars) until we can barely see over the rear-view mirror to drive, it is all part of a day’s work for an archivist. We’re also familiar with the many hours spent talking about the importance of our collections to potential donors in person, or via phone or e-mail. That is what makes the experiences of Jeanne Wier, as documented in her collecting diary for the Nevada Historical Society in July-August of 1908, sound so familiar more than one hundred years after she first jotted them down in her red leather journal. Yet as much as some of the experiences in the diary ring true to archivists and curators today, they are perhaps even more remarkable as a testament to the difficulties inherent in documenting the history of a state barely out of its infancy. The story of her own journey over the inhospitable terrain of southern Nevada in the fierce heat of summer at a

Su Kim Chung is head of Special Collections Public Services at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Libraries, where she has worked since 1999. She is currently a PhD candidate in information studies at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where she is completing her dissertation: “We Seek to Be Patient: Jeanne Wier and the Nevada Historical Society, 1904-1950.” Chung has an MLIS from UCLA, and an MA in history from California State University, Fresno, and is the author of the photo history book *Las Vegas Then and Now* (Thunderbay Press, 2012). She is curator of the Nevada Women’s Archives, and the entertainment and LGBT collections in UNLV, Special Collections.



Jeanne Wier, 1913. Photographer unknown. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

time when travel was difficult and sometimes next to impossible is every bit as intriguing as some of the pioneer stories she sought to collect for the historical society during this trip.

Jeanne Elizabeth Wier¹ had multiple roles in her lifetime—history professor and department chair at the University of Nevada, women’s suffrage supporter, devoted daughter and sister—but the role for which she is best remembered is that of collector and caretaker of Nevada’s history in her position as secretary (and founding member) of the Nevada Historical Society, from 1904 to 1950. The woman who would later proclaim that she had “grown to love the mountains and the valleys and even the desert wastes of this State” was born deep in the midwest—Grinnell, Iowa—on April 8, 1870, as the second daughter of Augustus William Wier (a Prussian immigrant who had served in the Union Army) and Elizabeth Greenside Wier (an Ohio native who had later settled in Iowa with her family and had lost her first husband in the Civil War).

The daughter of educators (her father was a teacher, high-school principal, and then superintendent of schools in Iowa and later in Oregon and California, and her mother a teacher of small children), the highly intelligent Jeanne Wier (valedictorian of her senior class at Clear Lake High School and later Phi Beta Kappa at Stanford University) appears to have naturally gravitated toward teaching. Even before her graduation from Iowa State Normal School with a bachelors degree in didactics in 1893, Wier had taken on various teaching positions in her native state. Shortly after her graduation, Wier followed her parents west to Heppner, Oregon, where her father served as superintendent of schools and her mother taught primary school children. Just barely twenty-three years old, Wier took the place of her sister Eva (who was herself off to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor to pursue a degree in English) as assistant high-school principal in the tiny town.² Despite her youth, both Wier’s teaching and her service as assistant principal were highly regarded, and a letter of recommendation for the latter had praised her quiet dignity and commended her as a “successful and superior teacher” who “held complete control of her classes and the room in her charge.”³

¹She was more commonly referred to as Jennie in her youth and throughout her life by family members.

²Clara Rood (Wier’s older half-sister, from her mother’s first marriage) had married Thomas Nichols Putnam in 1886 and settled in the North Dakota Territory. Her younger brother, Augustus William “Will” Wier, Jr., earned a law degree from the University of Michigan and even spent a year working with Jeanne at the Nevada Historical Society, in 1912. Another younger brother, Melbie Wier, listed in the 1880 census, must have died young as he was never mentioned in any subsequent census records or family correspondence.

³J.A. Morrow, Memo, 18 May 1895, 3:1, Jeanne Wier Papers, MS/NC 17, Nevada Historical Society, Reno.

It is not known exactly what prompted Wier to enroll in the recently established Stanford University, where she studied history, in 1895. She appears to have followed her family to California when or after her parents had left Heppner for financial reasons and moved to the San Francisco area, where her father took a position as a school principal in Newark. Although no correspondence survives from this early period of her life, she revealed later that she was only a part-time student for much of her time at Stanford, due to both ill health and teaching responsibilities in other parts of the state. At some point during her time at Stanford, she befriended Anne Martin, daughter of a Reno family, who was also studying history. After receiving both a B.A. and an M.A. in history from Stanford, Martin founded the history department at the University of Nevada, in 1897, but left to pursue further graduate study in Europe and on the East Coast in 1899. It was she who persuaded Wier to take her position in the history department at the University of Nevada that year, even though she still had a few more units to finish at Stanford. After completing her bachelor's degree from Stanford in 1901, Wier received a permanent appointment at the University of Nevada.⁴

Wier's first years in Reno were occupied with teaching, bouts of illness, and occasional lecturing in the small community; she would soon have many other activities to keep her busy. The first decade of the twentieth century was a time of great change in Reno. Following the mining slump of the late 1870s, a twenty-year depression had strangled the state, but gold strikes in central Nevada again transformed Reno into an important supply center for the newly created towns of Tonopah and Goldfield. The Reclamation Act passed by the United States Congress in 1902 (following years of advocacy by Reno's own congressman, Francis G. Newlands) also had a positive effect on the desert areas east of Reno and on the city itself. Both the gold strikes and the legislation contributed to something of a rebirth for Reno both economically and culturally as Progressivism took root in the city, which began to evolve as local political and cultural leaders sought to move "the tough little town on the Truckee" beyond its crude mining and frontier origins.⁵

One of the Reno institutions regarded as "a product of the expansion and reform of the decade" was the Nevada Historical Society.⁶ In 1904, Wier, together with a number of other University of Nevada professors and civic-

⁴Although Wier never earned a degree beyond her B.A. in history, she would go on to become chair of the Department of History and Political Science at the University of Nevada and served in this position until her retirement in 1940; in 1924 she was awarded an honorary doctorate (LL.D) in recognition of her many years of service to the university and her work in preserving the history of Nevada.

⁵See Alicia Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble: Image and Reputation in the Biggest Little City* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

⁶Wilbur S. Shepperson and Ann Harvey, *Mirage-Land: Images of Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1992), 78.

mindful citizens, took it upon themselves to form an historical society as a means to gather the state's historical relics and collect the personal histories of its pioneer settlers and residents. Wier was elected to the only professional office in the society—secretary and curator. Supported by a president, vice-president, treasurer, and small council, she was to do the bulk of the work for the Nevada Historical Society until her death, in 1950. Although popular with and supported by many notable figures in Nevada, the society rarely received the financial support needed during these crucial start-up years as the state suffered from a chronic shortage of funds. In 1907, at Wier's urging, Nevada's legislature made the society a state institution and provided a small biennial appropriation for the fledgling organization. It was never enough, however, and throughout the years, Wier struggled hard to make the society viable, and even harder to promote a sense of historical consciousness among the citizenry of Nevada.

In these early years, Wier performed a wide range of duties as secretary (and curator) of the Nevada Historical Society. She wrote letters far and wide in an attempt to add to the society's membership, to obtain financial support first from private citizens and then from the Nevada State Legislature for a building, to answer queries about Nevada history, and, perhaps most important, to collect Nevada history in all forms—from newspapers to documents to artifacts. In many cases, she pursued items by correspondence, having heard of them from like-minded citizens or Nevada Historical Society officers and council members. Yet Wier also knew the value of the personal touch, and made it a point to make collecting trips to various parts of the state—no mean feat at a time when some of the more remote parts of Nevada were not serviced by the railroads.

One of Wier's earliest and most significant collecting trips was to southern and central Nevada during July and August of 1908, when she spent almost a month and a half covering a wide swath of Lincoln County and parts of Nye County.⁷ Unfortunately, this collecting trip, arranged around her summer vacation from teaching duties at the University of Nevada, was made at undoubtedly the worst time of the year. The summer heat of southern Nevada was clearly unbearable, as were the swarms of flies that her diary entries record as a constant presence. She endured much personal discomfort from the extreme conditions, with sunburn and heat rash frequent companions during her journey. The "sultry" heat of the evenings made sleep impossible at times, as did the uncomfortable and questionable accommodations that

⁷It is of interest that her trip was made just prior to the division of Lincoln County into Clark County—a topic of great dissension at the time in southern Nevada, but it did not merit a mention in her diary.

characterized this rural section of Nevada.⁸ She complained frequently about the quality of restaurant food all over southern Nevada, and, like most of us, much preferred the home cooking she was treated to as a guest on numerous family farms. To some degree, her trip south required some advance planning, because of the lack of hotels and rooming houses in a part of the state that remained sparsely settled. She was much dependent on the kindness of families, not only for accommodations and food, but for transportation to remote areas where there were no trains, few or no stagecoaches, and automobiles traveled with great difficulty through sagebrush and cacti on dirt roads often washed out by summer rain.

Despite contemporary photographs that portray the thirty-eight-year-old Wier as the idealized Edwardian woman of the day, with a high-necked white blouse and curls neatly piled atop her head, the diary makes it clear that she was more than capable of roughing it. This is especially notable because many pieces of correspondence in the Nevada Historical Society's archives demonstrate that she was prone to illness from overwork. Jostling over unpaved desert roads, riding on horseback over rugged terrain, sleeping in the rough near the banks of the Colorado River, she appeared fearful only once, when staying in a tough mining camp in Nelson, near El Dorado Canyon. Recognizing the importance of mining to the history of Nevada's development was one thing, but staying in close proximity to the actual miners with their drinking and swearing was quite another, and she was clearly repulsed by their vulgarity.

Wier's surviving correspondence from the months just before her journey is sparse and does not seem to reflect the planning that must have taken place before her trip. In fact, why she kept a diary on this particular collecting trip is unknown; she had gone on previous collecting trips, and would go on others in the future, without leaving a written record. It may be that this is the only one that survived. It may also have been something that she kept as a record for herself as a means to inform the NHS Council on her return.⁹ Although some stretches of the diary are staccato in nature—marked by brief, incomplete sentences—much of the writing reveals Wier's wry sense of humor and her amusement at the primitive conditions she often had to endure during the trip. The only time she falls into hyperbole is when, camping on the banks of the Colorado near El Dorado Canyon, she writes dreamily of the landscape just after the rain while fantasizing about the days of the Spanish

⁸The heat and difficulty of that summer in Las Vegas remained a vivid memory for Wier, and she does not appear to have made another trip to Las Vegas until 1920, when she was attempting to recruit members for her various county committees. As she noted in a letter to a member of Las Vegas's newly formed Mesquite Club in 1911, "It is so far away that I cannot hope to reach it except in the summer and that is not a favorable time for such work." Jeanne Wier to Mrs. Givens, 11 April 1911, 1:11, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno.

⁹She does not, however, mention the diary in her recap of the trip contained in the Biennial Report.

explorers. Although dates and days were pre-printed in the diary, Wier often wrote more than the space allowed for each entry, and thus had to alter the dates as she went along. That is why some of the dates appear in the middle of the narrative as she had to write them in.

She often writes of “we” in describing her travels, but it is not clear who her traveling companions were at this time or whether this was a writing convention of some sort. The only person she mentions by name in the diary as accompanying her to some of these remote locations is the Goodsprings miner Frank Williams. Correspondence before and after her trip provides no clues as to whether she had made arrangements for traveling companions or, if so, their identities (other than Williams on occasion). One thing that is certain, however, is that she forged lasting relationships with many of the people she met on this trip; correspondence in the NHS archives shows that she remained in regular contact with many of them in subsequent years. Even in these very early years, some residents of southern Nevada clearly recognized the importance of preserving historical materials, although perhaps without the same degree of professionalism as Wier. Her diary also reveals encounters with a number of notable figures; from pioneer landowners and ranchers, newspapermen, and miners to businessmen and politicians, Wier met the movers and shakers of southern Nevada in its formative years.

It is of interest that Wier also mentions a number of women (Mrs. Harris, Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. McClure, Mrs. Miller, Mrs. Gracey) who were situated in southern Nevada’s remote mining areas. If we are tempted to think of Nevada as primarily a man’s state, Wier’s encounters with women in the dusty mining camps of southern Nevada make it clear that women played a large part in humanizing this rough terrain. Unfortunately, the mention of these women is so fleeting that it is difficult to discover the true nature of their work. Did they accompany their husbands into these remote areas? Were they widows? Additional research is needed here to flesh out a more complete picture of women’s roles in the history of southern Nevada, especially in rural and mining areas.

Much of Wier’s collecting focus at this time was devoted to gathering newspapers from the various mining towns strewn throughout southern and central Nevada. She was in the full flush of collecting at this time and rapidly scooped up artifacts throughout her journey. The most-valued prize of her collecting trip, and worth every bit of discomfort she endured that summer, however, was the acquisition of the papers of one of Nevada’s first United States senators, William Morris Stewart. They would become one of the seminal collections of the Nevada Historical Society.

Contemporary accounts of her trip in the *Las Vegas Age* detailed her travels and noted that she pronounced the people of the Muddy Valley and the northern parts of the county extremely friendly, hospitable, and helpful with her work. The paper reports with humor that Miss Wier was impressed with

the "magnificent distances" of Lincoln County.¹⁰ Looking back, one marvels at the attention Wier gave to small towns like Caliente and Delamar and mining camps like Searchlight and Nelson; but in 1908, many of these towns, now forgotten, had populations larger than Las Vegas, which in 1910 (two years *after* Wier's visit) had but 945 residents, according to census records of the time.

Upon returning to Reno at the end of August, Wier had immediately to prepare for the beginning of the academic semester, which delayed her follow-up correspondence. In October 1908, she wrote many letters to those persons she had visited in the south, in particular, the newspaper editors and owners who had promised her back issues. Keen to build up NHS membership in these sparsely populated areas, she also sent membership cards to her contacts in Pioche, Delamar, Rawhide, and St. Thomas, and asked for the relics they had promised her during her summer trip.

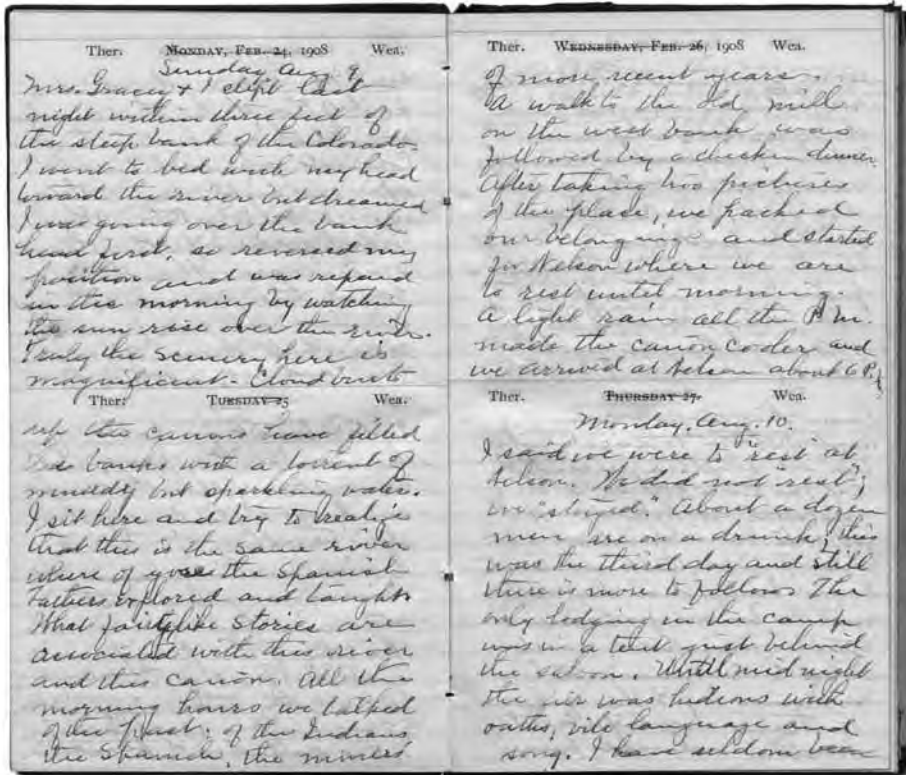
Early the following year, in the Nevada Historical Society's first biennial report, Wier wrote of the importance of her collecting trip: "No permanent success can be achieved by this organization until there is a least one person in each community who has a sympathetic knowledge of the work which we plan to do. Correspondence has failed to accomplish this end. But many a person who had been irresponsive to letters became interested and even enthusiastic when visited in person."¹¹

The diary that follows this introduction chronicles Wier's six-week summer sojourn into southern Nevada, and the sweat and toil she put into her work for the Nevada Historical Society in its early years. Annotations provide context for what is, by its nature, a brief document, and illustrate the rich history of the events, people, and places that surrounded Wier on her journey into the Nevada desert. Ultimately, the diary serves both as an institutional record with a detailed narrative of her collecting trip and as a fascinating snapshot in time of southern Nevada in the summer of 1908—a time when Las Vegas was a tiny railroad stop overshadowed by the thriving mining towns of Goldfield, Rhyolite, and Rawhide, and gaming was something restricted to the backroom of saloons.¹²

¹⁰"Nevada State Historian," *Las Vegas Age* (8 August 1908).

¹¹Biennial Report, Nevada Historical Society, 1904-1908, 31.

¹²In fact, gaming figured so little in the southern Nevada society of Wier's visit that she failed to mention it even once in her diary.



Jeanne Wier's diary, 1908. (Nevada Historical Society)

Wednesday, July 15 (1908)

Left Reno for Goldfield at midnight. Upper berth & hot. Noise from Reno Hotel Roof Garden, so no sleep until sleeper was attached to [train] 24 and left Reno. Diner left at Mina, - breakfasted before 7.30. Reached Goldfield at noon. Compelled to wait until Friday for train to Las Vegas. Staid at Hotel Goldfield and ate at Mission Café conducted by Mr. Tigi??] late assemblyman¹³ and a good friend of the Society. Hotel only recently furnished at cost of 1,000,000.

¹³Thomas Tigue was a Democratic assemblyman from Esmeralda County in the 1907 session. Renee Parker and Steve George, eds., *Political History of Nevada 2006* (Eleventh edition, Carson City: State Printing Office, 2006), 259.



Goldfield Hotel, Goldfield, Nevada. (*Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*)

View from balcony magnificent. [Word unintelligible] at sunset.¹⁴ Met a Mr. Lanier who has new method for working ores. Saw his cabinet and also old photographs. Owned stock in the Comstock in the 70's. Has certificate framed which shows dividends paid. (1875) Once asked John W MacKay¹⁵ for privilege of visiting mine. Latter said it would cost him \$3000. Because miners would talk to him. Then fitting up 10,000 for exhibit at Centennial Exposition. Has picture of woman who married a worthless doctor in San Francisco & was deserted by him in Paris. Mrs. J.W MacKay gave her money with which to return to U.S.

Night in Goldfield extremely hot. Left Friday a.m. at 10.10 for Las Vegas stopping at Rhyolite for lunch. Too hot to eat boiled beef and mince pie (75 cts).

¹⁴The luxurious Goldfield Hotel with the white-railed balcony above its entrance was brand new at the time of Wier's visit in 1908, so she would have been duly impressed with this magnificent structure even if the figure of \$1,000,000 for furnishings was something of an exaggeration. The sumptuous surroundings were described by Zanjani as consisting of a mahogany-trimmed lobby "resplendent with gilded columns, black leather upholstery, and globular chandeliers." See Sally Zanjani, *Goldfield: The Last Gold Rush on the Western Frontier* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 1992), 79.

¹⁵John W. Mackay—probably one of the most famous names in the history of Nevada mining—was responsible with his partners for discovering the Big Bonanza, the richest ore body on the Comstock Lode, within the Consolidated Virginia and California Mine, in 1873.



Panoramic view of Clark's Las Vegas Townsite, ca. 1909. (*Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*)

In the afternoon skirted the base of the Funeral and Furnace Creek Range and saw beyond them the Panamint with Death Valley lying between. A considerable breeze was blowing, but so hot that with ease one could appreciate the designations of the adjacent ranges. I had intended to make a trip into Death Valley but after this experience decided to wait till a cooler season. We reached Las Vegas at 5.25 PM. The letter telling of my coming had not reached Mr. W. [Frank Williams] so no one met me. The only hotel I desired to see was a cold storage warehouse near the Station,¹⁶ but I was taken instead to the Hotel Charleston whose saving virtue was a large balcony around three sides. No key in door so barricaded it as best I could. Was directed to the Overland Café for meals. The kitchen & dining room were practically one and with the thermometer at 100 degrees the

(Saturday, July 18)

sight of the blazing wood fire and other kitchen paraphernalia was not conducive to appetite. Dined on strawberries and tea. The night was too sultry for words. In the morning tried a Chinese restaurant and found cooler quarters tho not better food.

¹⁶She is most likely referring to the Armour ice plant located on Main Street that would have been easily visible from the railroad depot at this time. The building, operated by the Las Vegas Ice and Manufacturing Company, furnished ice to stations all along the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad Company (SPLASL) line as well as to local saloons. This was the second ice plant built in Las Vegas; the first had burned down in July 1907. See Stanley W. Paher, *Las Vegas: As It Began—As It Grew* (Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, 1971), 114-17.

Mr. Williams¹⁷ arrived on the limited this a.m. We went to the Stewart ranch in P.M., took a tramp over the old ranch and had tea with Mrs. Stewart,¹⁸ returning to Vegas late in the evening and sat on the veranda until midnight, too sultry to go indoors.

Sunday, July 19

After a 6.30 breakfast we left in Stewart team for the big Spring,¹⁹ three miles distant & n.w. Arriving there we tied horses in shade of a large cottonwood and took pictures of Spring, & ruins of Old Mormon houses a few miles steps distant.²⁰ Spent an hour near spring and on return photographed Ragtown in the suburbs of Las Vegas.²¹ This was the camping ground of the squatters who were waiting three years to buy lots in Las Vegas when the townsite was opened. 1500 people there once. Now only a few houses. Rested thr' heat of P.M. and at 4.30 drove

¹⁷A pioneer resident of southern Nevada, Frank Williams had been a supporter of the Nevada Historical Society since its inception, and served as a county vice-president for the society, representing first Lincoln and then Clark county from 1907 to 1926. A miner and prospector by trade, Williams resided in Goodsprings, and served as an assemblyman and for many years as a regent for the University of Nevada; in the latter role he also offered support to Wier in her position as history professor and department chair. Correspondence, both professional and personal, found in the records of the Nevada Historical Society and in the Jeanne Wier Papers suggest that he (and later his wife Edith) had a lifelong friendship with Wier.

¹⁸It was not surprising that Wier's first visit upon arriving in Las Vegas was to the residence of Helen Stewart. Often referred to as the First Lady of Las Vegas, Stewart was, at the time, probably the greatest living resource of information on the history of the Las Vegas Valley. After arriving in Las Vegas with her husband, Archibald, in 1882, Stewart had weathered his murder and the death of a child while struggling to run the Las Vegas Ranch. With the help of a ranch foreman and local Paiute Indians, Stewart successfully maintained the ranch and made it a refuge for tired desert travelers and miners, providing food, board, and conversation. She sold the Las Vegas Ranch and much of the surrounding property to William A. Clark's San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company in 1902.

¹⁹The Big Spring (usually referred to as the Big Springs) was an underground water source that bubbled up to the surface, forming a large pool. It and many others served as a source of water not only for indigenous tribes for many thousands of years, but also for Spanish explorers in the early nineteenth century, and later for Mormons and others traveling through the Mohave Desert to California or Utah.

²⁰It is possible that Wier was mistaken here in her description of these as "ruins of old Mormon houses" as there were no Mormon structures outside of the fort. Unfortunately, none of the photographs that Wier took on this trip has been located by Nevada Historical Society staff; whether the films were developed or even if they made it back to Reno after her trip is unknown, as no references could be found to them in NHS correspondence following her return, in August 1908.

²¹Ragtown was the area originally settled by the engineer and surveyor J. T. McWilliams on eighty acres west of the railroad tracks. At one time between 1904 and 1905, there were as many as three thousand residents on the McWilliams townsite; many of them miners who traveled between Las Vegas and the surrounding mining areas. He advertised it as "the original Las Vegas Townsite," but it had difficulty competing with Clark's Las Vegas Townsite because of the plentiful supply of water available in the latter. At the time Wier took the photographs, it would have consisted largely of tents and shacks. McWilliams himself made his home there. See A. D. Hopkins and K. J. Evans, *The First 100: Portraits of the Men and Women Who Shaped Las Vegas* (Las Vegas: Huntington Press, 1999), 30-31.

to Kyle's ranch three miles n.e. Beautiful orchard and chicken ranch. Scene of many murders in early days.²² Returning by Stewart ranch left team, called on Mrs. Johnson-Bracken and walked home by midnight.

Monday, July 20.

Called on Mr Ronnow²³ & then walked to the ranch where we had an appointment with Mrs. Bracken²⁴ to see historic points notably the old fort and wall, the baptismal pool, site of old grist mill and smelter. This is undoubtedly the second oldest if not indeed the oldest settlement in the state.²⁵

After a few moments at the Stewart's we were driven back to town, dined at the Arrowhead and spent afternoon in planning routes and reading Nevada History. Mr. W left at 6 p.m for Crescent.

Tuesday, July 21.

Spent the day at the ranch going over relics and old papers with Mrs. Stewart. Talked of plan to establish branch Society with museum at fort. Thunder storm threatened but more sultry than before.

²²Wier's mention of "many murders" at the Kiel ranch is most likely a reference to the shooting death of the Las Vegas Ranch owner Archibald Stewart in 1884 by Hank Parrish, a ranch hand, and the mysterious murder-suicide of the Kiel brothers in 1900. The latter crime was proved to be a double murder by anthropologists Sheilagh and Richard Brooks of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, upon their 1975 exhumation of the bodies. Although Wier uses the "Kyle" spelling here, the family spelled it as "Kiel."

²³The Ronnows were a prominent Mormon pioneer family in southern Nevada; they were originally from Panaca. Wier is probably referring here to Charles C. Ronnow, a well-known farmer and businessman in Las Vegas who later served as one of the first county commissioners in the newly formed Clark County. Prior to the move to Las Vegas, he had served as a schoolteacher in Panaca; in Las Vegas he partnered with Ed Clark in operating one of the first mercantile stores in the dusty railroad town. See Paher, *Las Vegas*, 122; Panaca Centennial Book Committee, *A Century in Meadow Valley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1966), 27.

²⁴Anna Bracken (née Johnson), wife of the Las Vegas Land and Water and SPLASL agent Walter Bracken, was a native Nevadan, born in Eureka, and a graduate of the University of Nevada. She had taught school in the mining town of Delamar prior to her marriage to Bracken in 1905 and their move to Las Vegas. As one of the leading citizens of the fledgling town, she was a natural choice to escort Miss Wier. See Hopkins and Evans, *First 100*, 27.

²⁵The Mormon station at Genoa, built in 1851 near the Carson River in northern Nevada, was the oldest, non-indigenous settlement building in Nevada. The Mormon fort in Las Vegas that Wier refers to was constructed four years later, in 1855. Although Wier was confident that it was the second oldest settlement, it is unclear whether Williams Station and earlier pockets of settlement around the Mormon Station at Genoa actually predated the Las Vegas fort.

July 22

Morning spent in copying from Judge Beal's scrap book²⁶ and interviewing Mr. Squires, editor of the Las Vegas News [sic].²⁷ After lunch went to Mrs. Stewart's where Indian Ben was waiting. He is an unusually intelligent Indian (Paiute); has ranch three miles distant. Told us about last Mohave war and settlement of Las Vegas ranch.²⁸ In the evening, Mrs. Stewart and I went over to the old ranch to look for the old water wheel but did not find it. Mrs. Bracken gave permission to have section cut out of old tree on which is to be painted a picture of the old fort. We walked into town shortly before ten. Met Mrs. Sledmans[?] a descendant of Gen. Vallejo.

Thurs. July 23

Flies millions thick and room so musty can not keep
windows closed otherwise very comfortable.

Left Las Vegas shortly before noon. Took S.P., Los Angeles and Salt Lake Road to Caliente. Agent failed to check baggage at Vegas so had to hand [word missing] two heavy valises all day. At Caliente changed for Panaca

²⁶Marius Samuel Beal advertised his services in the *Las Vegas Age* at various times between 1907 and 1910 as an attorney or office attorney specializing in water appropriations, patents for mines, and corporation law. He was frequently referred to as Judge Beal although there is no evidence to suggest that it was anything more than an honorary title. Because he was an ardent booster of his adopted city, it is not surprising that he would have kept a scrapbook of events related to the early history of Las Vegas. At his death, in January 1910, his obituary in the *Las Vegas Age* noted that he had been an active member of the Lincoln County Division Club and the Vegas Artesian Water Syndicate. See *Las Vegas Age* (5 February 1910). Beal had also been an enthusiastic proponent of safeguarding and promoting the area around Mount Charleston for recreational purposes. See "Watershed and Timber," in *Las Vegas Age* (17 August 1907).

²⁷Charles Pember Squires—or C. P. "Pop" Squires—was a pioneer resident and businessman of Las Vegas who was present at the May 1905 auction of Clark's Las Vegas Town Site and had erected a tent hotel to house buyers. Squires purchased the *Las Vegas Age* (Wier wrongly refers to it as the Las Vegas News here) from C. W. Nicklin in June 1908 and was to remain editor and proprietor for almost forty years. He would become one of the city's biggest boosters over the years, and, as a member of the League of the Southwest and the Colorado River Commission, played a large part in bringing about the construction of Hoover Dam. See Hopkins and Evans, *First 100*, 36-39.

²⁸Wier had long been interested in studying the Indian population of Nevada, and even wrote her Stanford history thesis on the Washoe Indians. She was a product of her times, however, and her references to the indigenous population sound patronizing and racist to the modern ear.

where big Mormon celebration is to be held tomorrow.²⁹ [Word unintelligible] Train crowded and people anxious about places to stay in Panaca.³⁰ Learn that lodginghouse which I was recommended has been closed. Got stage driver who takes my baggage to drive me from place to place. Everything full. Finally persuade old-time family, the Matthews,³¹ keep me, as rain is threatening, glad of shelter. Given guest parlor. No screens on windows. Flies millions thick and room so musty can not keep windows closed otherwise very comfortable. At least have one cool night for sleeping.

Friday, July 24

Awakened by brass band and cannonade in park two blocks distant. Fourth of July spirit in air. All Matthews girls have come home to celebrate. Three young ladies, 2 small boys and one girl. Older sister Mrs. Barker has one little girl. At ten we go to Hall to hear program. Speeches & music. Great enthusiasm for the Church. Then came barbecue. Two long tables; beef, beans, pickles, bread & butter. Ice-cream is sold at a stand near by.

²⁹The big Mormon celebration Wier refers to is Pioneer Day, honoring the entry of Brigham Young and early Mormon pioneers into the Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1847. It was celebrated as a birthday, a day of thanksgiving, and an independence day (in Utah and surrounding areas heavily colonized by Mormons); it was thus not surprising that Wier would characterize the atmosphere as having a "Fourth of July spirit." The barbecue, music, speeches, and dances she describes in the July 24 diary entry were typical of the activities held on Pioneer Day. Alan Kent Powell, ed., *Utah History Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 423-24.

³⁰Panaca was the first Mormon settlement established in the water- and silver-rich Meadow Valley, in 1864. It took its name from the Paiute word for metal, money, or wealth. At that time the area was still considered a part of Washington County, Utah Territory; the boundary change making it a part of Nevada did not occur until 1866. Although the Mormon missionaries who first settled there made some initial exploration of the potentially rich silver-mining areas surrounding Panaca, by the summer of 1865, they were threatened with excommunication if they went to the mines. In 1871, a boundary tax dispute erupted when Meadow Valley settlers refused to pay the taxes assessed by Lincoln County, Nevada, preferring to pay their taxes to Washington County, Utah. As a result, some settlers left their Panaca farms and returned to Utah. By the end of 1871, the dispute had been settled, and additional settlers came to Panaca. Although the town's population included some miners in the late nineteenth century, the town was comprised largely of Latter Day Saints (LDS) members who focused on freighting, agriculture, and ranching. A history of Panaca would later describe these settlers as "moved by the noblest incentives to build a community that would be a credit to their Church." See Panaca Centennial Book Committee, *Century in Meadow Valley*, 40. It was not surprising that this warm and friendly community would welcome a stranger, Jeanne Wier, into their midst, especially one who was appreciative of their roles as pioneers in this area.

³¹The LDS Church sent Charles and Elizabeth Matthews from Utah to settle in Panaca in 1866 in an effort to colonize the area. They brought eight children with them and had another two children after their arrival. The family worked primarily in freighting, farming, and raising cattle. They were also known for their hay ranch, the Cold Spring Field, and were active in civic affairs around the small community. Wier stayed with one of the Matthews families here, but which one is unclear. It is possible that it was the family of Charles and Elizabeth's son, William Matthews, Sr., and his wife, Ann, as they had a family of nine children, including five girls. See Panaca Centennial Book Committee, *Century in Meadow Valley*, 201-202.

In afternoon talk with Mr. John Lee, a great enthusiast for the Church.³² In evening we visit the dance for a short time, then to bed.

Sat. July 25

This has been a trying yet withal a successful day. A funeral was set for 10 a.m. and as the entire community attend such an event, it was useless to expect to work until that was over. At 10. the members of the family commenced to make preparations in a leisurely fashion. Shortly before 11 we drove to the schoolhouse and at 11:20 the services began. They lasted one hour and 20 min. after which all adjourned to the cemetery where another hour was spent in service and filling in the grave.

Mr. Matthews then drove us to Bullionville where Mr. Godby showed me thro' the old smelter and gave me relics of the early days.³³ After taking photographs we returned to Panaca, dined at 3 P.M. and took more pictures. Packed valises and donned traveling suit, then went to spend last moments talking with Mr. Syphus.³⁴ At 6 P.M. prepared to drive to Pioche with Mr. M—and daughters but weather threatening and cloud burst day previous and washed out road. So decided to postpone trip till morning. Had tea and spent evening with Mr. Syphus and Mr. Charles Matthews, both pioneers in this section. Present of the old flint lock from the latter.

³²The Lee name was also well known in Panaca. Wier is most likely referring here to John Nelson Lee, son of Francis and Jane Vail Johnson Lee, who had settled in Panaca in 1864. John Lee was married to Melissa Kaziah Rollins Lee and had had several farming ventures in the Panaca area. See Panaca Centennial Book Committee, *Century in Meadow Valley*, 173-75.

³³Bullionville, a small mining town just a mile north of Panaca, would have been long gone at the time of Wier's visit in 1908. Established in the 1870s as a satellite of the mines around Pioche, its reliable water supply made it the ideal site for the mills needed to handle the ore from the nearby mines. During its boom years, a narrow-gauge railroad, the Pioche and Bullionville Railroad, was constructed to transfer the ore from the Pioche mines to the reduction mills in Bullionville and, by 1875, it had a population of five hundred and the first iron foundry in eastern Nevada. Its boom years quickly faded and, by 1880, the construction of water works in Pioche to handle the ore led to its decline. See <http://www.onlinenevada.org/bullionville> (accessed 20 July 2011) and http://nvshpo.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=283&Itemid=9 (accessed 20 July 2011)

³⁴The Syphuses were one of the most prominent LDS families in Panaca, having settled there around 1867. Although Wier does not specify which Mr. Syphus she spoke with, her desire to collect pioneer histories make it highly likely that she was speaking to Luke Syphus, patriarch of the Syphus family, who would have been about eighty-one years old at the time. Together with his wife Christiana, he had ten children, nine of whom survived into adulthood. The name remains well known in southern Utah and the Muddy Valley of Nevada even today. Panaca Centennial Book Committee, *Century in Meadow Valley*, 229-32.

Sunday July 26.

Retired at 10 but little sleep as girls of family came home one by one from dance. Rose at 3:30 and at 4 a.m. left for Pioche arriving there between six and seven.³⁵ Went to the Cecil, a dilapidated old hotel but having shade trees over front. Flies so bad that went to store & got tanglefoot.³⁶ Hotel in keeping with town which is at first glance a mass of ruins. But people are genial enough. After breakfast slept two hours, made toilet & had lunch. Spent afternoon at Dr. Campbell's.³⁷ Met Senator Freudenthal.³⁸ In morning Wm. Orr and George Nesbit called.³⁹

³⁵Pioche was named around 1870 for the wealthy French financier and investor François Louis Alfred Pioche, who developed large portions of San Francisco and was involved in various mercantile enterprises and municipal improvements. His connection to Nevada came via his investment in developing the mining areas around Meadow Valley in eastern Lincoln County. The town of Pioche served as the county seat for many years and was most noted for its "million dollar" courthouse. During its peak in the early 1870s, the town held some of the richest silver and gold ores in the state, but when they were exhausted the community went downhill quickly. It rallied briefly in the 1890s with the discovery of new ore, but these ores were quickly tapped out and the tiny town remained remote from much of Lincoln County. Wier's visit would have occurred during one of its intermittent boom periods, 1906-1909, when the SPLASL constructed a branch rail line into Pioche as it traversed the state. She did not take the railroad, however, and the difficulty she experienced in traveling to Pioche seemed to confirm the historian James Hulse's characterization of Pioche as "the Timbaktu of Nevada," referring to its remoteness. Brooke D. Mordy and Donald L. McCaughey, *Nevada Historical Sites* (Reno: University of Nevada System, Western Studies Center, 1968), 116; James W. Hulse, *Lincoln County, Nevada: 1864-1909: History of a Mining Region* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1971), 11, 21-50.

³⁶A type of insect repellent applied to trees.

³⁷Listed as physician, surgeon and state senator in the Pioche, Lincoln Co.—1907-08 Business Directory. <http://files.usgwarchives.org/nv/lincoln/business/pioche1907.txt> (accessed 6 July 2011). Dr. Campbell was a member of the society since its early days; correspondence between Wier and Campbell dating from 1906 can be found in the archives of the Nevada Historical Society.

³⁸Freudenthal was the owner of the *Pioche Record* (*Lincoln County Record*) on two occasions before leasing it to Eugene Goodrich and Willam E. Orr. Freudenthal is also listed as manager of the Lyndon Mines Co. in the Pioche, Lincoln Co.—1907-08 Business Directory; he was also the state senator from Pioche. See Richard E. Lingenfelter and Karen Rix, *The Newspapers of Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1984), 164-65.

³⁹Although William Orr owned the *Pioche Record* for a time, he had a long and prestigious legal career in Nevada as well. Starting out as Lincoln County clerk in 1906, Orr became Lincoln County treasurer in 1911. After reading law at the University of Nevada, he first became district attorney and then district judge in Lincoln County. After six years as a Nevada Supreme Court justice, Orr became chief justice in 1943, until he was appointed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit by President Harry S. Truman in 1945. He served in this position until his death, in 1965. George Nesbit (Wier had misspelled his name here as Nesbitt) was the brother of James A. Nesbit, who is listed as a saloon owner in the 1907-1908 Pioche business directory. Wier's later correspondence with Nesbit shows that he actually resided in Delamar and had promised to provide her with samples of Delamar money for the historical society's collections.

Monday July 27

I am greatly surprised and touched by the
generosity and cordiality of the people of Pioche.

Spent morning at Court House⁴⁰ Looking into old records of the bond issues. Met Mr. Henry Lee⁴¹ as well as Mr. Goodrich and Wm. Orr for second time. Obtained promise of file of Pioche Record since 1872.⁴² After lunch took pictures of Pioche, visited cemetery, and looked thru' record in Clerk's Office of the first years of Lincoln County. A week could be spent in this interesting building. Packed or rather watched Sen. Freudenthal and Mr. Goodrich pack the Records and other gifts from Pioche. I am greatly surprised and touched by the generosity and cordiality of the people of Pioche. Tomorrow morning I leave for Caliente.⁴³

⁴⁰Wier undoubtedly refers here to what would become known as the infamous million dollar courthouse in Pioche. Originally built at a cost of \$26,400, it had grown to some \$75,000 at its completion, in 1872. Interest on the construction debt grew so high that by the time it was paid off, in 1939, it was reputed to have totaled \$1 million, but the historian James Hulse has said it was more likely to have been around \$800,000. See http://onlinenevada.org/lincoln_county_courthouse (accessed 15 February 2012).

⁴¹Henry H. Lee was a businessman from Panaca and a member of a pioneer Moapa Valley family. Later that year (1908) he challenged and defeated Ed W. Clark of Las Vegas in the county treasurer's race. Lee is listed as proprietor of the Pioche Meat Co. as well as county recorder and auditor in the Pioche, Lincoln Co., 1907-08 Business Directory. See also Paher, *Las Vegas*, 108-109; and <http://files.usgwarchives.org/nv/lincoln/business/pioche1907.txt> (accessed 6 July 2011).

⁴²The *Pioche Record* (later *Lincoln County Record*) was Lincoln County's pioneer paper; it began publication in September 1870 at Pioche, in the Ely Mining District, as the *Ely Record*. The original office was destroyed by fire in 1871, which would explain why Wier was to receive issues only from 1872 onward. The paper had changed hands many times, but at the time of Wier's visit, Eugene Goodrich and William E. Orr were the owners and editors. The complicated ownership history of Lincoln County's pioneer paper is detailed in Lingenfelter and Gash, *The Newspapers of Nevada*, 164-65. Unlike most of the papers Wier collected during her travels, the *Record* is still in existence today.

⁴³Caliente, just twenty-five miles south of Pioche, would have been a fairly new and raw town at the time of Wier's visit. Located at a junction in Lincoln County where Clover and Meadow Valley meet, it had previously been the site of a ranch owned by Charles Culverwell, a prominent local citizen. By 1901, it was referred to as Calientes after the nearby hot springs. Its development came about as the railroad tycoons E. H. Harriman (Union Pacific and Oregon Short Line) and W. A. Clark (SPLSL) competed to see whose track would reach it first. Clark eventually won the rights to bring his line through, making it a division point on the line, and the little town grew accordingly; in 1903 the "s" was dropped from the name when it got its first post office. The heavy rains Wier remarks on in her diary were common in this area, and had caused severe flooding that often wiped out tracks and roads in these early years. Hulse, *Lincoln County*, 63-64.



Panoramic view of main street in Pioche, Nevada, 1905. (*Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*)

Tuesday, July 28

Reached Caliente soon afternoon. Went to Denton House.⁴⁴ Walked all afternoon but accomplished little. Files of Lode are incomplete.⁴⁵ Mr. McNamee not in town, but Mrs. J.Q. McIntosh loaned me films of Las Vegas & Caliente. Brought Panaca pictures of Japanese photographs. [this sentence unintelligible] Showered all afternoon and evening a heavy rain. No screens & flies are millions thick. Think I have lost my appetite.

⁴⁴Wier may be referring to the Denton Hotel that was owned by James A. Denton (owner of the Caliente-Pioche Stagecoach Line as well), who had served as both a state assemblyman and senator representing Lincoln County. Various members of the Denton family settled in Caliente in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to the 1907-1908 Caliente business directory, members of the Denton family served as deputy sheriff and as assistant postmaster. Ralph Denton, the noted Las Vegas attorney, is a descendant of this family.

⁴⁵Wier may be referring here to the *Caliente Lode-Express* (which had been the result of a merger between the suspended newspapers *Caliente Express* and *De Lamar Lode*, in June 1906). It suspended publication in December 1908. Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 26.

Wednesday, July 29

Senator Denton persuaded me to go to Delamar while waiting Mr. McNamee's return.⁴⁶ Only 30 miles but a rough ride from 8:30 a.m. to 5 P.M. In many places road washed out by last night's rain. No place for lunch. Had two oatmeal crackers and a cookie. Cup out of which I drank tasted like whiskey. We changed horses at Oak Station where a man killed himself July 10. Brought away the cord hanging on the tree. Passed a man coming from Alamo.⁴⁷ In afternoon watered horses at Grassy Springs. No grass in sight. Near Delamar saw location of old Monkey Wrench Mine and town; so named because man struck rock with monkey wrench and discovered gold.⁴⁸ This camp soon abandoned for Helene farther along the road. Several houses remain at this camp although the mine is not worked now Magnolia Mine. Delamar is oddly located. Enclosed on all sides by hills. Must have been great camp in its time.⁴⁹ I have had dinner, fairly good at California Café, and have what seems like clean room at the Delamar lodging house. Last night the roof leaked so that I was obliged to fold all my clothes and put away in the three small wash-stand drawers so as to have dry clothes to wear in the Morning. Even the bed was wet.

⁴⁶Frank R. McNamee, attorney for the Union Pacific Railroad, resided in Caliente at this time. His sons and grandsons continued his law firm and represented the Union Pacific Railroad.

⁴⁷Alamo was located just east of Delamar in the Pahrangat Valley.

⁴⁸The founding of the Monkey Wrench mining district in early 1892 led to a brief bit of mining fever as locals flocked to the area south of Pioche in search of the rich gold ore that the *Pioche Record* reported that February. Typical of the mercurial nature of mining ventures at the time, the colorfully named mining district was quickly abandoned for another camp nearby. See Hulse, *Lincoln County*, 51.

⁴⁹Delamar, located about forty miles southwest of Pioche, had been named for Captain J. R. DeLamar, a Dutch immigrant who had previously owned mines in Idaho and Montana before his move to Nevada. It had reached the peak of its gold-producing years in the late 1890s, but by the time of Wier's visit was just about tapped out. Its mines were notorious for producing "DeLamar dust," a fine dust that clogged the lungs, choking and killing the miners who had been exposed to it. See Hulse, *Lincoln County*, 53-55. Captain DeLamar was well known for his wealth in Nevada; in 1909, Wier asked him to contribute the funds needed to construct a building for the Nevada Historical Society. This was after Governor Denver S. Dickerson had vetoed the legislative bill that would have provided the funds. DeLamar did not oblige.

Thursday, July 30.

Last evening Mr. Ward Stephenson called. Is an old-timer in this country. Has promised to look for missing files of Delamar Lode and also to write history of camp. Very intelligent and interesting.⁵⁰ My windows and door opened out on the main street. No key to door, neither to hall door, but slept well. Had lunch put up at restaurant and started for Caliente at 9 a.m. Took picture at Oak Station both of Station and place where Baum hung himself. From the station in one wheel of stage was nearly off. Stopped once to repair it and succeeded in reaching Caliente safely. Saw Mr. McNamee and Mr. Dranga, owner of the Lode. Latter gave consent to removal of Lode file and Mr. Preston OKed it. After talk with Mrs. McGuffie, an old timer from Hiko, went to bed.⁵¹

Friday, July 31

Got wagon grease on kakhi [khaki] suit yesterday and spent an hour removing that this morning. Packed and shipped papers to Las Vegas. Ride to Moapa hot. Hired team and drove to Logan in evening. Stage runs but three times a week. Just missed it this morning. Logan is not a town but a collection of farm houses. The ride from Moapa was not bad except that we crossed the Muddy several times and once had to drive down it for 50 yards before coming into the road again. We passed at least a dozen loads of cantaloupes going into Moapa. One team got stuck in the quicksand while fording the river and we had to wait some time for it to pull out.⁵² Broke both tugs in crossing. Stopped at Church's in Logan. Mrs. Church away.

⁵⁰The *De Lamar Lode*, like many mining-camp newspapers, had a long and convoluted history of name changes and editors. From its beginnings as the *Ferguson Lode* in September 1892 and to its transformation into the *Lode* in Pioche in March 1893 it was rechristened the *De Lamar Lode* in June 1894 in De Lamar (formerly Helene). From there, various editors struggled with making it a weekly and daily edition until June 1906; at that point the Lincoln County Publishing Company suspended publication and moved the plant to Caliente to merge with the *Express*, and the paper became the *Caliente Lode-Express*. See Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 61.

⁵¹Hiko, located in the Pahranaagat Valley, was one of the oldest mining communities in Lincoln County and was mentioned as far back as 1867-68 in the state mineralogist's report. Although at one time it had had a mill (servicing the nearby silver mines), a post office, stores, and a court house, and had even served as the county seat, by the time of Wier's visit, it had long since passed its prime. See Hulse, *Lincoln County*, 14.

⁵²The treacherous quicksand of the Virgin and Muddy riverbeds would have been a common danger for residents of the area at this time. Accounts written by LDS settlers in the nineteenth century make frequent mention of this danger. It made them attempt alternate routes through the desert or over the mountains, routes that were often just as dangerous because of the summer heat and lack of water. See, for instance, G. Lynn Bowler, *Zion on the Muddy: the Story of the Saints of the Moapa* (Logandale, Nevada) Stake (Springville, Utah: Art City Publishing, 2004).

Saturday, Aug. 1

Fearfully sultry night. Slept on floor when girl tried to occupy bed with me with her feet in my face. Have feasted on cantaloupes, watermelon, peaches & grapes.⁵³ Went to station farm in company with H.H. Church, one of the Directors.⁵⁴ New home nearly completed. Ate half a watermelon and took pictures. In afternoon visited the old tithing house, now occupied by Mr. Mills. This was also the old home of the Logans for whom the settlement is named.⁵⁵ At supper, heavy thunder storm came up. Men had to put down tent sides of dining room. Large limb crashed down on roof. Saw cantaloupes [word unintelligible - slipped or sluffed?]

August 2

Very heavy rain in night. Two men from Utah stayed all night. One a professor at Provo.⁵⁶ Are trying to buy land in the valley. After breakfast Mr. Church drove me to Overton reaching there about noon. Went by way of old St. Joe on hills. Once quite a city. Now a heap of ruins.⁵⁷ Here Mormons settled but found it difficult to get water, so moved into lower valley. Had

⁵³The area was well known in southern Nevada for its rich soils and the many farms that produced a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. Cantaloupes were a particular specialty as were peaches, apricots, and apples.

⁵⁴Wier refers here to the Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station farm constructed in 1905 on eighty acres of land in Logan (later Logandale) to explore agricultural and horticultural possibilities in the semi-tropical climate of the Moapa Valley; the farm also raised bloodstock. An article in the *Las Vegas Age*, dated June 8, 1907, indicates that H. H. Church was a very busy man indeed. In addition to his work as director (E. H. Syphus of St. Thomas was the other director), Church owned his own farm, ran a supply store at the Logan post office, and served as secretary of the Muddy Valley Telephone Company.

⁵⁵Logandale was named for Robert Logan, a rancher who had settled in the Muddy Valley area after 1881. He took over lands that had originally been farmed by LDS settlers until the boundary tax dispute forced many of the Saints to return to Utah, in 1871. The town's name was later changed to Logandale (on June 30, 1917) to avoid confusion with Logan, Utah. Helen S. Carlson, *Nevada Place Names: A Geographical Dictionary* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1974), 156.

⁵⁶Brigham Young University, in Provo, Utah, founded in 1875.

⁵⁷The original settlement at Overton was known as Old St. Joseph, named for its first settler, Joseph Warren Foote, who was part of the original wave of LDS missionaries directed to the Muddy River Valley by Brigham Young in the 1860s. After much of it burned in 1868, a new community called Overton was built on this site in 1870, but it had been abandoned at the time of the boundary tax dispute in 1871. In 1880, Elizabeth Whitmore purchased much of the land in this area, including what was known as Old Overton; her son arrived to farm this land the following year. It was located approximately two miles south of the original Overton, and on the opposite bank of the Muddy River. By 1885, there had been enough Mormon resettlement in the area to allow the formation of the Overton Ward. See Mordy and McCaughey, *Nevada Historical Sites*, 37-38.

opportunity to go to St. Thomas in evening.⁵⁸ Pearsons had been to doctor 12 miles away and were returning home. Two cases of blood poison. Roads bad and got in shortly before nine. Found Mr. Syphus at the Gentry's [*sic*]. Pleasant place to stop. Clean and comfortable but no cold water.⁵⁹ Weather very hot. In spite of air from two doors and two windows could not sleep.

Monday, August 3

I cannot understand how people live on the Muddy without ice.
I would pay \$5 to-night for a drink of cold water.

Took pictures of Gentry place and the Bonelli house. These oldest in town.⁶⁰ Saw a number of old settlers and gained much information. Started to go to salt mine but Virgin too high.⁶¹ Mr. Syphus is a great tease. Gave me a ten cent ring for an engagement. Have decided to give up Bunkerville trip. Virgin River too high and heat unendurable. I cannot understand how people

⁵⁸St. Thomas, located near the confluence of the Virgin and Muddy rivers, was named for Thomas S. Smith, who had led the Mormon settlement into the Muddy Valley in January 1865. After the Boulder Canyon Act was passed in 1928, the United States Government bought St. Thomas; its residents abandoned their homes and businesses by the mid 1930s, and, following the completion of Hoover Dam in 1936, the waters of Lake Mead rose to cover the remnants of the once thriving farm town two years later. Carlson, *Nevada Place Names*, 208; http://www.nevadamagazine.com/issues/read/st._thomas/ (accessed 5 October 2011).

⁵⁹The Gentrys were well known for the hospitality they showed guests at their fourteen-room hotel in St. Thomas in the 1910s. At this early date, however, Wier may be referring to a boarding house run by the Gentrys.

⁶⁰Both the Gentry and Bonelli names were well known in St. Thomas at the time of Wier's visit. Daniel and Ann Bonelli had been one of the original families to settle in the Muddy Valley area in the 1860s; they stayed on even after most of the other Mormon settlers had left because of the boundary tax disputes which placed St. Thomas in Nevada and not Utah. The Bonelli house that Wier writes of may be the five-room adobe house described in Arbell Lee Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy* (Springville, Utah: Art City, 1967), 38. It was thatched with tules from the nearby swamp. The floor was said to have been constructed of hewed cottonwood limbs held down with wooden pegs. The Gentry family was part of a second wave of Mormon settlement that began to re-populate St. Thomas after 1880; the patriarch Harry Gentry was to become an important business and church leader in St. Thomas. See Aaron McArthur, *St. Thomas, Nevada: A History Uncovered* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2013).

⁶¹Wier is most likely referring to the salt mines or the salt mountains just south of St. Thomas. Settlers on the Muddy mined the most obvious salt deposits on the surface of the mountains although there were interior caverns of salt known primarily to the local Indian tribes. Lake Mead's waters covered the salt mines after the construction of Hoover Dam. See Bowler, *Zion on the Muddy*, 143-45.

live on the Muddy without ice.⁶² I would pay \$5 to-night for a drink of cold water. My face and body are covered with prickly heat.

Tuesday, Aug. 4.

Rose at 3:30 a.m. and took stage for Moapa at 4. So very hot that could scarcely get dressed. Stopped at Logan for breakfast. O. the filth and dirt of these settlements. Heat too great apparently for people to keep clean. Nevertheless got a good cup of coffee. Reached Moapa at noon. Dinner at Mrs. Powers' and drove to Indian Reservation where purchased five baskets and two water bottles. Two of baskets and two water bottles actually in use.⁶³ Caught the 3:20 train and at 5:30 arrived at Las Vegas where I shall spend a day cleaning up and re-packing. People on the train looked at me as though I had come out of the wild west show.

Wednesday, Aug. 5.

Have spent entire day with correspondence, and petty work of trying to make the travelling clothes once more presentable. Track is washed out up north so cannot leave for Searchlight as intended.⁶⁴ Invited out to Brackens on old Stewart ranch to spend the night.⁶⁵

⁶²As Wier and the Mormon settlers before her discovered, the area surrounding the Muddy River was one of the most challenging spots in all of southern Nevada in which to eke out a living and to simply exist. The oppressive summer heat, the salinity of the soil, and the propensity of both the Muddy and Virgin rivers to overflow their banks made life very difficult for those who chose to settle there. These difficulties, along with contentious relations with local Paiute tribes, and the realization around 1871 that this area was deemed to be within Nevada's boundary rather than Utah's, led many LDS settlers to return to Utah at this time. Yet, not everyone left, and some even returned to the area in the 1880s.

⁶³Wier refers here to the Moapa River Reservation which was (and is) home to the Moapa Band of Paiute Indians. Established in 1874, with lands totaling some two million acres, this was later reduced to a mere thousand acres in 1875. It was not until 1980 that more than seventy thousand acres were added to the original thousand. http://www.moapapaiutes.com/about_us.htm (accessed 20 July 2011).

⁶⁴In the early twentieth century, rains and flooding frequently washed out the railroad lines coming from Pioche and Caliente and through the Meadow Valley Wash, thus delaying trains to and from Las Vegas.

⁶⁵Anna and Walter Bracken lived at the site of the former Stewart Ranch, which was itself built on the site of the Mormon Fort that had been constructed in 1855. Mrs. Stewart had moved to another location in town after selling the ranch and surrounding property to the SPLASL railroad in 1902.

Thursday, Aug. 6.

After the restaurant fare how good the dinner tasted last evening at the Ranch. Later Mrs. Bracken and I went to call on Mrs. Stewart. She told us much of her life on the ranch. Truly she is a pioneer of the pioneers.⁶⁶ After a nights' rest in the s.w. room of the old fort house and an inviting breakfast, I returned to town to find that there would be no train south until afternoon or evening. I borrowed Mrs. [Crafts?] history of San Bernardino and have read it through.⁶⁷

Friday, Aug. 7.

Train did not leave for Nipton until 10 P.M. Mr. Brown of Searchlight went on same train.⁶⁸ Reached Nipton at midnight.⁶⁹ No hotel open, so broke into a lodging house where beds were made up & took possession of rooms. A good natured drunk young man insisted that we should cook him some eggs before he retired but we declined. This morning he discovered that he had taken the wrong train and was south instead of north of the Vegas. We had a good breakfast with Mrs. Harns, the store-keepers' wife. Took the stage for Searchlight at 8:30 a.m. met Mr. Williams at Crescent⁷⁰ persuaded me to remain until evening and go in the automobile with him. My headquarters in Crescent were with Mrs. Kelley who keeps a lodging house in a large tent with canvas partitions. As there is no floor the gunny-sack rugs are musty from the

⁶⁶Wier would maintain a warm relationship with Mrs. Stewart until the latter's death in 1926, as evidenced by their frequent correspondence found in the records of the NHS. She was much desirous of purchasing Stewart's valuable Indian basket collection for the NHS, but despite numerous efforts, was never able to persuade the legislature to provide the funds. After Stewart's death, the collection was unfortunately broken up and sold to buyers in Nevada and elsewhere.

⁶⁷Wier, an avid reader of any local history with relevance to Nevada, is referring to Eliza Persis Russell Crafts and Fannie P. McGhehee, *Pioneer Days in the San Bernardino Valley* (Redlands, California, 1906).

⁶⁸She may be referring here to Mr. T. A. Brown who was a shareholder in Searchlight Publishing, the corporation that published the Bulletin, Searchlight's main newspaper at this time. Harry Reid, *Searchlight: The Camp That Didn't Fail* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1998), 64.

⁶⁹The small mining town of Nipton (formerly the mining camp of Nippeno) was located just west of Searchlight on the border with California near what today would be the northern edge of the Mojave Preserve. The San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad stopped at Nipton, and a stagecoach line would then have transported her to Searchlight. Although she refers to a Mrs. Harns as the shopkeeper's wife, voting records of 1908 reflect that it was a Mr. Karns who served as shopkeeper at this time. It may have been a transcription error. See <http://www.nipton.com/historynipton.html> (accessed 20 July 2011).

⁷⁰The *Las Vegas Age* described Crescent on July 27, 1905, as "six miles east of Nippeno and 17 miles distant from Searchlight. It is 60 miles from Vegas and has an elevation of 4,300 feet." Another article described it as having a population of two hundred people in 1905. It was a fairly active mining area in the first decade of the twentieth century and was known for its turquoise ores. The *Age* reported in 1907 that Williams had significant holdings in the Crescent mining district, so he may have had business reasons to be in the area during Wier's travels.

recent flood and the air is foul. But we sat in the shade of the tent much of the day and got really good meals at Mrs. Jordan's. Mrs. Jordan also keeps a lodging house but it has bright clean floors.⁷¹ Mrs. McClure gave us some Indian polishing stones. We took the automobile for Searchlight at 10 P.M. arriving at the latter place at mid night. It is a perfect night with moonlight nearly as bright as day.

Saturday, Aug. 8.

I sit here and try to realize that this is the same river
where of yore the Spanish Fathers explored and taught.

My room at the Wheatley House was a paradise when compared with previous accommodations—good carpet, iron bed, large mirror and comfortable rocker. The night was too short for today we were to go to El Dorado Canon [*sic*].⁷² We left with one of Mrs. Miller's teams at 10 a.m. and reached the mouth of the canon shortly after six P.M. During the last part of the drive the scenery was sublime and the Colorado, when it burst upon our sight, was a stream never to be forgotten. What cordial, gracious people the Gracey's [*sic*] are.⁷³ When they heard that a woman was coming into camp, a cool white dressing sacque was laid out, a bottle of Pond's Extract for bathing the sunburned face, and everything else that might conduce to the comfort of

⁷¹The *Las Vegas Age* referred to Mrs. Gertrude Jordan on March 22, 1913, as a pioneer of the Crescent mining district. She later gained fame as co-owner of the noted Tiffany Mine, which produced high-grade turquoise, as reported in the *Las Vegas Age* on November 13, 1920.

⁷²Spanish explorers may have mined at Eldorado Canyon (as it is more commonly spelled today) as far back as the eighteenth century. Brigham Young directed some of his followers to mine this area northeast of Searchlight in the mid-nineteenth century. The canyon was distinguished geographically by the presence of the Colorado River that coursed through it; before the coming of the railroad, the river provided an important transportation route servicing the mines and the people both of the canyon and nearby Searchlight in the late nineteenth century. The area was fairly active in the nineteenth century, and it was thought that during the Civil War era some fifteen hundred people lived in the canyon. Of the mines in the Eldorado Canyon, the Wall Street mine was known as one of the largest producers of gold in southern Nevada in the late nineteenth century. Reid, *Searchlight*, 1-4.

⁷³Mr. and Mrs. Charles Gracey had been residents of Eldorado Canyon for almost twenty years at the time of Wier's visit. Mr. Gracey was described as one of the Nevada pioneers by the *Las Vegas Age* and had been in charge of the Bullionville smelters during the boom years of the Pioche mines. When production there ceased, he moved to Eldorado Canyon and took charge as manager of the Wharton properties before leaving in July 1909. See *Las Vegas Age* (17 July 1909). Wier obviously thought highly of his status as an early settler in Lincoln County for she asked him to write down some of his experiences, which he did in a lengthy article entitled "Early Days in Lincoln County." It appeared in the first biennial report of the Nevada Historical Society, published in early 1909.

the traveler. We had dinner the quaint old dining room near the store and then went around the edge of the precipice to sit in front of the bungalow on the west cliff. Here the evening was spent talking of the early days of Nevada.

Sunday, Aug. 9.

Mrs. Gracey & I slept last night within three feet of the steep bank of the Colorado. I went to bed with my head toward the river but dreamed I was going over the bank head first, so reversed my position and was repaid in the morning by watching the sun rise over the river. Truly the scenery here is magnificent. Cloud-burst up the canons have filled the banks with a torrent of muddy but sparkling water. I sit here and try to realize that this is the same river where of yore the Spanish Fathers explored and taught. What fairylike stories are associated with this river and this canon. All the morning hours we talked of the past: of the Indians, the Spanish, the miners of more recent years. A walk to the old mill on the west bank was followed by a chicken dinner. After taking two pictures of the place, we packed our belongings and started for Nelson where we are to rest until morning. A light rain all the P.M. made canon cooler and we arrived at Nelson about 6 P.M.

Monday, Aug. 10.

Until mid-night the air was hideous with oaths, vile language
and song. I have seldom been worse frightened.

I said we were to "rest" at Nelson.⁷⁴ We did not "rest," we "Stayed." About a dozen men are on a drunk; this was the third day and still there is more to follow. The only lodging in the camp was in a tent just behind the saloon. Until mid-night the air was hideous with oaths, vile language and song. I have seldom been worse frightened. Fortunately Mr. Williams was with me during the early evening & later occupied a tent next to mine. The meals are good, Mrs. Calahan being a good cook. Mr. Alvord gave me a government picket pin and a piece of old pottery. He will dig for more in the old caves. I

⁷⁴At the time of Wier's stay, Nelson was a mining camp, but today it is a small historic mining town located at the top of Eldorado Canyon. The miners she speaks of with disgust were most likely workers at the nearby Techatticup Mine, which produced gold, silver, and lead, but was most famous for its gold. There are conflicting stories about how it got its name; one claims it was named after a miner, killed in the canyon while another suggests that a Canadian mining company named it after a town with the same name in British Columbia. See Donna Andress, *Eldorado Canyon and Nelson, Nevada: Historical Documents and Reminiscences Commentary* (Nelson, Nevada: privately printed, 1997), 9.



Tents in mining camp near Las Vegas, ca. 1905. (*Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*)

was glad when I could leave this awful camp and return to Searchlight. An oil smelter invented by Mr. Loder of Reno is being installed at Nelson. We got into Searchlight at 2 P.M. and found that no seats could be had in the automobile bound for Crescent that evening; so we decided to remain until morning. I got the file of the Searchlight bulletin and a valuable piece of old pottery.⁷⁵ The evening was spent in conversation with pioneers, after which we went for a stroll around the town, but was ill from riding and fatigue and returned to my room ready for rest. A cloud-burst Sunday had washed out the roads so that in many places we had to drive over the rough sage brush and cacti.

⁷⁵The *Searchlight Bulletin* was originally published as the *Searchlight*, a weekly paper, beginning in June 1902. It became the *Searchlight Bulletin* in October 1906 and continued publication until January 1913. Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 225.

Tuesday, Aug. 11.

I am tired, so tired, tonight, but happy to think of the trip made to the famous turquoise mines near Crescent and to obtain some of the old stone hammers used by the Aztecs in working the mines.⁷⁶ Mr. Dougherty and [Miss]Mr. Perkins of Searchlight accompanied us and we ate our lunch on the porch of the bunk house below the mine. We obtained some good specimens of turquoise and an old papoose basket which hung in a deserted tent at a camp. In Crescent we had dinner, packed the relics ready for shipment next morning, & after a short walk, looked in upon the dance in Miners & Union Hall. This is the first time I have seen a Phonograph used for furnishing the music at a dance. There were about four couples, all the town could afford. I am glad to retire for we must be on our way early in the morning. How do people live in these musty old tents?

Wednesday, Aug. 12.

Dressed under difficulties, no water in room, neither a mirror. Toilet had to be made beside the front door where passers by as well as lodgers passing could gaze on the operation. Finished breakfast by 6:30 and rode in lumber wagon without springs to Nipton 6 miles distant, where took train for Jean. Here found Mr. & Mrs. Robbins going to Goodsprings and rode with them. Very pleasant people. Stayed at Mr. Yount's hotel, an oasis in the desert.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Although Wier believed at this time (as did others) that Aztecs had done the first turquoise mining in this area, it is more likely, as John Townley reported that they were the leading importer of Nevada turquoise. It is certain that Indians of pre-historic times (not necessarily Aztecs) mined turquoise in this area, and that the Aztecs then used this turquoise in decorative and religious items. See John Townley, "Turquoise: Nevada's Forgotten Mining Industry," in *Nevada Highways*, 32:4 (1972), 28. In 1908, the "discovery" of these unique pre-historic mining implements was so exaggerated that the *San Francisco Chronicle* falsely reported that Wier had discovered the remnants of an Aztec village at this location. See "Turquoise Mines Worked by Ancient Peoples," *Las Vegas Age* (3 October 1908).

⁷⁷The Yount name was well known in southern Nevada at this time. Joseph Yount had purchased the Manse Ranch in Pahrump in 1876, and had also been instrumental in organizing the Yellow Pine Mining District near Goodsprings, in 1883. The Mr. Yount of whom Wier writes in the diary was most likely his oldest son, Samuel Yount, who settled in the Goodsprings area in 1893, opening a general store that was initially housed in a tent. Although a downturn in the mining industry led him to close the general store in 1896, Yount was back in business by 1899, operating both his general store and a popular boarding house/hotel and serving as postmaster as well. The author Robert McCracken notes that this boarding house was "renowned for its excellence," as evidenced by Wier's description of it as an "oasis in the desert." Robert D. McCracken, *A History of Pahrump, Nevada* (Tonopah: Nye County Press, 1990), 9.

Everything clean and cheerful. Excellent meals and beautiful garden. Talked with Mr. Yount in P.M., then took pictures and after dinner we drove in moonlight to the Kent and Green Mountain mines.⁷⁸ Wonderful production of lead and zinc. House after 10 P.M.

Thursday, Aug. 13.

Could not sleep because of sore arm. Burnt in sun thro' thin waist. Breakfasted at 6 and left for Jean at 7. Took train for Vegas at 9:06. In Vegas spent day with correspondence and other detail work.

Friday, Aug. 14.

Chief event today was organization of an auxiliary society at this place.⁷⁹ Very fitting the meeting was held at the old ranch. After a picnic lunch and a plunge in the pond we discussed plans and made the organization.⁸⁰

Saturday, Aug. 15.

I am unexpectedly spending the night in Rhyolite. Expected to go to Pahrump and Manse but at Armargosa [*sic*] found that the stage did not leave until Monday. Was fortunate enough to catch the train north making this point in the middle of the afternoon and found Prof. Show of Stanford ready to show me the town and aid in the work.⁸¹

⁷⁸It is possible that she is referring here to the Green Monster Mines (with lead and zinc ores discovered in 1893) just sixteen miles northwest of Goodsprings, as described in Alan H. Patera, *Goodsprings, Nevada, and the Towns and Camps of the Yellow Pine Mining District* (Lake Grove, Oregon: Western Places, 1999), 35.

⁷⁹Wier realized early on that the state's size and distances within it would make it impossible for her to gather historical documents and artifacts without the help of local community members. To that end, county vice presidents were elected to promote the NHS throughout the state. Although there appeared to be great promise in a southern Nevada auxiliary society, the society seems to have had little luck in this regard. This was due as much to a lack of continuation in Las Vegas as to the numerous tasks that overwhelmed Wier on her return to Reno. In fact, it was not until 1982 that the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society in Las Vegas was founded.

⁸⁰A picnic lunch and a swim would have been a common leisure activity for early Las Vegas residents. The pond she mentions was most likely the pool at the Las Vegas Ranch—formed in the creek where it had been dammed—shaded by large cottonwood trees. It was the first public swimming pool in Las Vegas.

⁸¹Arley B. Show was a professor of European history who had been one of Wier's instructors at Stanford University. She had remained close to the history department and its faculty after her graduation, in 1901, and seems to have maintained a friendship with Professor Show. Although a professor of medieval history, Show demonstrated a strong interest in the activities of the Nevada Historical Society; he was a frequent correspondent of Wier's and was mentioned on several occasions in the society's biennial reports.



Panoramic view of Rhyolite and Bullfrog Hills, 1909. (*Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*)

It was with a sense of regret that I left the friends at Vegas but only to find others at this place. Rhyolite is quiet now but has some fine buildings and gives evidence of past prosperity.⁸²

⁸²Wier's statement appears ironic in light of Rhyolite's ultimate fate as no town epitomized more the boom-and-bust cycle of Nevada mining than Rhyolite. From its humble beginnings in 1904 as a mining camp just outside of the mines discovered by Frank "Shorty" Harris and Eddie Cross in Nye County, it had evolved into a thriving and prosperous town site by 1907. Serviced by three railroads, at its peak in 1907, Rhyolite had forty-five saloons, an opera house, two railroad depots, two electric light plants, three public swimming pools, the two-story Miners' Union Hall, and numerous other buildings. Some eighty-five mining companies were active in the surrounding hills and the population was estimated to have been between eight thousand and twelve thousand during 1907 and 1908. Its most famous resident, William Stewart, had moved to the town in the spring of 1905. The Panic of 1907 was said to have killed Rhyolite, with the town's many eastern investors withdrawing their backing and forcing many mines to close. At the time of Weir's visit, in August 1908, there was still some life left in the town, and the "fine buildings" that she refers to may have been the John S. Cook Bank building and the Overbury building, which would have been two of the most expensive buildings in town. Much of the population would have departed by that time; it stood at a mere 675 in 1910, and was down to 14 by 1920. See Shawn Hall, *Preserving the Glory Days: Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of Nye County, Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999), 260-65.

Sunday, Aug. 16.

Drove to Beatty in the morning and received promise of file of the Beatty Bullfrog Miner.⁸³ Editor also promised to hunt for relics of Death Valley emigrants. The greatest event of the morning was the inspection of Senator Stewart's Office and deserted home.⁸⁴ If the Society can acquire the papers and manuscripts left here by him, this treasure will alone repay me for the hardships of this summer trip to the South.⁸⁵ The afternoon was spent with Prof. Show at the Bullfrog Miner Office hunting out files of that paper. It was a dusty job and we succeeded in finding only Vol. III and part of Vol. II.

Monday, Aug. 17.

Experienced a hard day in Goldfield.
People too crazy after gold to care much for history.

This morning we held up the Herald Editor for files of that paper and succeeded in obtaining a loan of Vol. I, II and III to Aug. 30, 1907.⁸⁶ Also secured nearly a complete file of the Bullfrog Miner and a few copies of Vol. I. Mr. Clemens also gave me a file of the Hornsilver Herald besides several old

⁸³The *Beatty Bullfrog Miner*, like many mining camp papers, had a brief but convoluted run. It was initially published in Beatty as the *Bullfrog Miner* in April 1905 as its publisher, C.W. Nicklin, who also owned the *Las Vegas Age*, battled it out with a rival paper of the same name in the nearby Bullfrog mining camp. It became the *Beatty Bullfrog Miner* in May 1905, and ownership was then transferred among a number of men until the paper was suspended, in July 1909. See Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 16.

⁸⁴After a stint in the territorial legislature, William Morris Stewart, an attorney and Union sympathizer who had been a mining lawyer on the Comstock (after having previously served as California's attorney general), was selected by the Nevada state legislature (together with James W. Nye) to represent Nevada in the United States Senate just one week after it had achieved statehood. He would eventually spend nearly thirty years as a United States senator (1864-75 and 1887-1905) and was one of the most influential politicians in the early history of Nevada.

⁸⁵The papers of Senator William Morris Stewart did indeed come to the Nevada Historical Society after he sent Wier a letter authorizing the donation later that summer. Wier documented her return to Rhyolite in October to pack up the majority of Stewart's books and papers for the society (and other materials from central Nevada); her description appears later in the collecting diary that is transcribed here.

⁸⁶Wier is referring to the *Rhyolite Herald*, which began publication in May 1905 under Earle R. Clemens and Guy T. Keene. Like the town, the paper's circulation grew rapidly at first, with Lingenfelter and Gash reporting that by 1909 it had a circulation of some ten thousand and was distributed in a number of major cities in the United States. By the time of Wier's visit, in August 1908, Clemens had bought out his partner and was serving as both editor and publisher of the paper. He subsequently sold the paper to Frank F. Garside, in April 1911, but the paper's fortunes seemed to follow the decline of the town, and publication was suspended in June 1912. See Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 218.

posters.⁸⁷ With the assistance of Prof. Show all these things were packed in a large telescope basket secured by a heavy rope and checked to Goldfield. I found quite a treasure at Mr. Holt's photograph gallery in the shape of an historical album of the Bullfrog District.⁸⁸ Ordered one completed and agreed to pay \$20 for the same. I also secured a number of postal card photographs of Rhyolite and a picture of Death Valley. Took train at 3:06 P.M. for Goldfield where I put up at the Grimshaw. Saw Mr. Tighe & had dinner at his café.

Aug. 18.

Experienced a hard day in Goldfield. People too crazy after gold to care much for history.⁸⁹ Mr. Burnell of the Tribune told me in polite language that I was crazy to spend time for the State.⁹⁰ But Editors of Chronicle-Review and of News very cordial and pleasant.⁹¹ Promised to try to secure files. Pleasant

⁸⁷The *Hornsilver Herald* was only months old at the time of Wier's visit, its first number having been issued on May 9, 1908, when the Hornsilver mining camp itself was but two weeks old. A typical short-lived mining-camp newspaper of this era, however, it suspended publication in September of that year. See Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 119-120.

⁸⁸The Bullfrog mining district, located in the southern portion of Nye County, came into being with the gold discoveries of Frank "Shorty" Harris and Ernest L. Cross on August 4, 1904. At the time of Wier's visit, it encompassed the thriving towns of Beatty, Rhyolite, Bullfrog, and Amargosa; just over a hundred years later, only Beatty remains as a viable reminder of that once booming era.

⁸⁹Along with Tonopah, Goldfield was the epicenter of Nevada's second mining boom, which began in the early 1900s. The discovery of gold in 1902 by Jim Butler's grubstakers William Marsh and Harry Stimler at a remote location just twenty-five miles from Tonopah marked the beginnings of Goldfield, a site that produced some of the richest gold ore in the American West. Typical of the boomtowns of that era, it had what the historian Russell Elliott termed "a rapid rise, an intense boom, and a quick decline." Russell R. Elliott and William D. Rowley, *History of Nevada*, 2d ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 218. Wier, in August 1908, visiting Goldfield at the height of this brief boom, would have been in the thick of the wild speculation, with promoters attempting to secure investors for their mining stock by any means possible. This town of fine houses and a luxurious hotel, numerous newspapers, churches, schools, a progressive women's club, and a wide variety of entertainment (including the famous Nelson vs. Gans boxing match of 1906) would begin its slide into oblivion with the decline in production of gold ores in 1910; a devastating fire in 1923 destroyed fifty-two blocks of homes and businesses and signaled the death knell of the once flourishing town. Elliott and Rowley, *History of Nevada*, 218-20; James W. Hulse, *The Silver State: Nevada's Heritage Reinterpreted* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1998), 167-70.

⁹⁰J. M. Burnell was manager of the *Goldfield Tribune*, which began publication in 1906. See Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 105.

⁹¹The *Goldfield News* began publication on April 29, 1904, and at the time of Wier's visit, Charles S. Sprague was the "cordial and pleasant" owner (and presumably editor) she mentions. Like most boomtown papers, the *Goldfield News* switched owners and editors frequently over the years, but unlike most papers founded in that era, it had a relatively long life, surviving, in various guises, into the mid 1950s. The *Goldfield Chronicle-Review* by contrast, suffered a more typical boomtown newspaper fate. It began publication initially as the *Goldfield Chronicle*, under the editorship of Horace Dunn on November 22, 1906, was combined with the *Goldfield Review* in 1908 to become the *Goldfield Chronicle-Review*, and ceased publication less than three years later on February 27, 1909. See Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 101, 107.

interview with Prof. McKay of the Public Schools. Mr. Allen, photographer is to give estimate of cost of historical albums. Introduced to Mr. Hardy, Co. Treasurer, but did not find him at Court House. Transferred to Tonopah on evening train. Rooms at Greystone. Mrs. Hudson was Winnie Strosnider Mr. Davidovitch called.

Wednesday, Aug. 19.

Saw Kenneth Booth last evening at dinner in restaurant. To-day interviewed the editors. No hope of the Miner at present.⁹² Two files at office. One may some day be available. Bonanza files for sale but Mr. Booth would not let them go until after Election.⁹³ Commenced sorting out files of the Sun.⁹⁴ Very dirty job.

Thursday, Aug. 20.

Finished files of Sun, & freighted box to Reno. Mr. Smith has pioneer photographs for album.⁹⁵ Took my pictures. Mr. Dunlap & Mr. McIntosh very pleasant and helpful in work. For once legend true, for one end rested on pot of gold on the Mizpah mine. Let us hope it means better days for Tonopah. Met Mr. Irwin of Stanford and Mr. Westal of U. of N. Tonopah good with exception of unpleasant experience at Bonanza office.

⁹²Wier refers here to the *Tonopah Miner*, which was founded in June 1902 by C. J. McDivitt and T. H. Eckles. The *Miner* perfectly illustrates the transient nature of many newspaper enterprises in early Nevada in that the paper switched owners and editors early and often, beginning in August 1902, then in February 1903, October 1907, October 1912, November 1914, October 1915, and April 1916. Despite this regular turnover, the paper was successful for almost twenty years until it suspended publication in November 1921, as Tonopah's mining boom wound down and the town went into decline. See Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 240-41.

⁹³This is a reference to the November 1908 election. There is some confusion here, as Lingenfelter and Gash, authors of the definitive work on Nevada's newspapers, list William W. Booth as the publisher of the *Tonopah Bonanza*.

⁹⁴She is referring here to the *Goldfield Sun*, the first daily newspaper in Goldfield, which was published between February 1, 1905 and September 22, 1906 by Lindley C. Branson. See Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 103.

⁹⁵Robert McCracken noted that E. W. Smith was the second photographer to come to Tonopah, operating a studio from 1900 through the 1920s. Although Wier may have been successful in getting some pioneer photographs on this trip, many of Smith's photographs went to the Central Nevada Historical Society much later. See Robert D. McCracken, *A History of Tonopah, Nevada* (Tonopah: Nye County Press, 1990), 18. Mrs. Hugh Brown (Marjorie) of *Lady in Boomtown* fame also referred to Mr. Smith and his "cluttered little gallery" located over the Oasis Saloon in her memoir. Smith took most of the photographs of leading citizens and holiday events in her book. Mrs. Hugh Brown, *Lady in Boomtown: Miners and Manners on the Nevada Frontier* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 5.

Aug. 21

Up early. Freight out box of newspapers. Off for Blair at 9:20 a.m. From Blair Junction travelled on a queer little train to Blair.⁹⁶ Good hotel; too good for the town; charges enormous and dining room worse. Prices on menu high and these doubled when you come to pay bill. Waiter impudent. This is part of the fun of a Secretary's life. Mr. Mix, editor of Blair Press drove me to Silver Peak, an interesting old camp three miles distant.⁹⁷ Found many relics and brought away a few. When we obtain frank on R.R. will take away other. Met Mrs. Deby [Dely?]& wife, both Stanford people. Wrote to Senator Stewart asking for left-overs of his Library at Rhyolite.

Aug. 22

Traveling in Southern Nevada requires a long purse...

Last night too sultry for sleep. Up at 5 to take 6:45 train but found it did not go until 8:15. Searched for restaurant and found one run by Chinese. Fairly good. Mr. Arthur White very kind looking after baggage. Arrived in Mina at noon. No stage or auto for Rawhide till morning. After lunch

⁹⁶The short-lived town of Blair developed by accident as a result of the mining boom in the area surrounding Tonopah. Because land speculators had driven up the price of land in nearby Silver Peak, in 1907 the Pittsburg-Silver Peak Gold Mining Company built its stamp mill in Blair instead and it was the mill that supported the town. Wier's trip on the "queer little train" to Blair would have been on the Silver Peak Railroad, built in 1906 by the same company. As another typical mining town of the early twentieth century, Blair would find its hotel and its "impudent" waiter long gone, and most of its town deserted, by 1920. See State Historic Preservation Office at: http://nvshpo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=242:nevada-historical-marker-174&catid=70:esmeralda-county&Itemid=540. (accessed 15 October 2011).

⁹⁷Silver Peak, discovered in 1863, would have been one of the oldest mining areas in Nevada even at the time of Wier's visit. Located some thirty miles southwest of Tonopah in Esmeralda County, Silver Peak had two stamp mills by the end of 1867. It suffered from a degree of lawlessness in the 1860s but was, at times, one of the leading camps in Nevada, according to the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. Although it rallied briefly with the appearance of the Pittsburg Silver Peak Gold Mining Company in 1906, and the construction of the Silver Peak Railroad, by 1917 it had largely disappeared. The town itself burned in 1948. See http://nvshpo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=238:nevada-historical-marker-155&catid=70:esmeralda-county&Itemid=540 (accessed 15 September 2011).

changed dress and called on J. Holman Buck, editor of the *Mina Miner*.⁹⁸ Very agreeable & helpful with suggestions for work. Mr. Davis of the Davis Hotel also very pleasant. Met Mr. Davis of Carson, graduate of 1908 in Blair this morning. Mina a young town, about three years old.⁹⁹ Two good hotels and a few good houses, many shacks. Telegraphed to Reno for money. Travelling in Southern Nevada requires a long purse.¹⁰⁰ Mr. Davis kindly invited me to accompany party on automobile ride, sped five miles beyond Sodaville and back. Called on Arnid [?] Taylor.

Sunday, Aug. 23

Lazied around all a.m. and at noon found the auto would not go to Rawhide so took train for Wabusca [sic]. At Scherry [?] found that auto would leave in p.m. for Rawhide so stopped off. After waiting two hours at the Reservation we started. Delightful ride of 28 mi. Put up at Nevada Hotel where one can hear the engine on the Grutt Hill Mine working all night just in the rear.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸Wier uses a colloquial name here for Buck's newspaper; it was actually called the *Western Nevada Miner*. It began publication on July 4, 1907, and Buck served as sole editor and proprietor for almost a quarter century until illness led him to suspend publication in December 1927. He sold it to Fred W. Egelston who revived the paper in March 1928, but the depression forced him to suspend publication in December 1930. For more information see Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers of Nevada*, 154. Buck was to become a great friend to the society in its early years and was always interested in helping acquire historical artifacts. In a letter to Davis, dated December 9, 1914, Wier praised the collecting efforts of both Davis and Buck: "If everyone in the state took one tenth of the interest that you and Mr. Buck do we would be out of all our difficulties and on the road to Heaven." Wier to Davis, December 9, 1914, Nevada Historical Society Records, MS/NC 280, Nevada Historical Society, Reno.

⁹⁹Mina was named in 1905 for the remarkable Ferminia Sarras, a Nicaraguan woman of aristocratic Spanish descent known as the Copper Queen; she first mined in the area around Bellville and Candelaria in the early 1880s. She recorded dozens of claims and was noted for her remarkable physical strength and agility in carrying a forty-pound mining pack on her small frame, and her ability to withstand the harsh and desolate conditions of the Nevada desert. Known for her eccentricity, Sarras made and lost several fortunes in her lifetime. See references in Sally S. Zanjani, *A Mine of Her Own: Women Prospectors in the American West, 1850-1950* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁰In the First Biennial Report of the Nevada Historical Society, Wier, perhaps apologizing for the costs of her collecting trip, remarked, "In a country so sparsely settled and where stages run infrequently, if at all, the question of economical and rapid transit is a difficult one." Biennial Report, Nevada Historical Society, 1904-1908, 31.

¹⁰¹The Grutt Hill Mine was located just outside of Rawhide on Grutt Hill, one of the most distinctive physical features surrounding the town. The mine and hill were both named for the four Grutt brothers—Eugene, Emil, Fred and Leo—who arrived in Rawhide in August 1907 and were soon among the short-lived town's leading citizens. See Hugh Shamberger, *The Story of Rawhide: Mineral County, Nevada* (Carson City: [for sale by the Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources], 1970), 1.

In diner at noon saw all the Republican "lights" who were returning from states Convention at Goldfield held yesterday. Col. Maxson my neighbor was nominated for Congress and P.L. Flanigan for Senator. Hugh Brown for Supreme Court.¹⁰²

Monday, Aug. 24.

Very busy day in Rawhide hunting our files of the News and Press-Times. Mr. Emerson also gave me file of Fairview News.¹⁰³ Very much interested is Mark H. Bryan, manager of the Press-Times—a Comstock boy, first born in Virginia. Father one of big men at that time, showed me a keepsake; paper with signature of all member of first Territorial Legislature of which his father was a member. Hope to get it sometime. Rawhide quite a town tho' largely built of tents.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²She is referring to the 1908 Republican State Convention in Goldfield (the *Nevada State Journal* reported that delegates were irritated at having to travel the great distance to the central Nevada town). Wier mentions here her neighbor Col. H. B. Maxson, who served as Reno's city engineer and as vice-president of the National Irrigation Congress; she also speaks of the wealthy Reno businessman and Nevada state senator P. L. Flanigan; as well as of Hugh Brown, a Tonopah attorney and Stanford graduate whose law firm sent him to open an office in the booming mining town in 1904. Brown would later serve as the first president of the Nevada Bar Association. His wife, Marjorie, would gain fame many years later as the author of the delightful memoir *Lady in Boomtown: Miners and Manners on the Nevada Frontier*, which chronicled her family's twenty-two years in Tonopah. All three of the candidates Wier mentions lost their elections.

¹⁰³Wier was seeking out the initial issues of the *Rawhide News* and *Rawhide Press-Times*, both of which began publication in early 1908 in the expanding boomtown, and ceased to exist shortly afterward, in 1909 and 1911, respectively, after the town's rapid decline. Clyde Emerson, editor of the *Rawhide News*, had previously published the *Fairview News* in this Churchill County mining camp for about two years, beginning in 1906, but suspended publication in early 1908 to make the move to Rawhide. See Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers in Nevada*, 173.

¹⁰⁴The timing of Wier's visit in August 1908 found Rawhide at the peak of its brief but remarkable boom (1907-1908); in fact, the boom would be largely over by the following month, and on September 4, Rawhide suffered a fire that destroyed much of its business district. The fire spread rapidly through the town that Wier described as "largely built of tents" but harmed no residential areas. Nevertheless, the boom was over, and from an estimated peak population in 1908 of more than seven thousand residents, Rawhide was reduced to a population of fifty by 1920. See Shamberger, *Story of Rawhide*, 21, 29-31.

Tues Aug. 25

Very busy morning in Rawhide. Finished files of Press-Times and met the Grutts.¹⁰⁵ Took auto at noon. Saw Mr. Leavitt at Schurz.¹⁰⁶ Arrived at Wabuska [sic] at 3:40 and started immediately for Yerington by auto.¹⁰⁷ Broke down twice so it was 5 P.M. by time we reached Yerrington. Changed dress and had dinner at Holland Hotel. Then found Mrs. Cr. At the Hernleben's [sic]. She insisted on my coming to her house. Mr. Hernleben one of the oldest settlers in Valley.

Wed. Aug. 26

Worked on file of the Yerington paper and in evening went out to the Reymers's [sic] Ranch,¹⁰⁸ where had dinner, fed the pigs and gathered eggs. Chicken dinner and splendid breakfast.

¹⁰⁵It is not surprising that Wier's visit would include a meeting with the Grutt brothers, as they were among the leading citizens (and mine owners) of Rawhide. Eugene Grutt, although next to the youngest of the brothers, was known around town as the "Daddy" of Rawhide, and served as secretary of the Rawhide Times Publishing Company, which had originally published the *Rawhide Times*, predecessor to the *Rawhide Press-Times*. See Shamberger, *Story of Rawhide*, 1; Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers in Nevada*, 173.

¹⁰⁶Schurz is a tiny community located on the Walker River Indian Reservation in Mineral County, Nevada. At the time of Wier's brief stop, Granville Ernest Leavitt was the physician assigned to the Walker River School on the reservation. See "Deaths," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 81:14 (1923), 1223.

¹⁰⁷As Wier slowly traveled north back up to Reno, she made stops along the way, including this one at Wabuska in the Mason Valley area of Lyon County. At this time in the early twentieth century, Wabuska and Yerington were the primary suppliers of agricultural goods to the mining camps around Tonopah and Goldfield. <http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/nevada/wab.htm> (accessed 10 October 2011).

¹⁰⁸Thomas Wren's *A History of the State of Nevada* describes the Reymers Ranch as a 320-acre ranch located in the Mason Valley near Yerington (Lyon County) and farmed by the German immigrant Barney H. Reymers (a former member of the Nevada Assembly) and his son, William A. Reymers. B.H. Reymers was also considered enough of a pioneer that he assisted in providing place-name origins for various Lyon County locations in a thesis published by the Nevada Historical Society in its Third Biennial Report, covering the years 1911-12. See Thomas Wren, *A History of the State of Nevada—Its Resources and People* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1904), 755.

Thurs., Aug. 27

How good it is to go to my Journey's end this time and to go home.

Came to town and immediately took train for Mason Valley mine where Mr. Lewis showed us thro' the mine, etc. After lunch drove to the Western Nevada Copper Mine which we explored and after dinner drove home in the cool of evening.¹⁰⁹ Found callers waiting but too weary to talk much. Mr. Willis promises to get loan of file of Yerington papers. Obtained a number of valuable specimens in the mine; also potatoes grown 50 ft. inside a tunnel.

Friday, Aug. 28

Finished work at Yerington Times Office and found piece of old press in yard.¹¹⁰ Took auto at noon to Wabuska where boarded train for Reno. How good it is to go to my Journey's end this time and to go home.

¹⁰⁹Copper deposits had been discovered in the Mason Valley as early as the mid-nineteenth century but had not been commercially successful; it wasn't until the boom of the early twentieth century that investors began to develop this region of Lyon County by opening new mines and building a railroad and smelter. See Hulse, *Silver State*, 178.

¹¹⁰Although there had been a number of papers published in the Lyon County area in the late 1890s, the *Yerington Times* was the only paper published in Yerington at the time of Wier's visit in 1908. Although it began its existence as the *Lyon County Times* in July 1901, it was re-christened the *Yerington Times* in September 1907, and went through the typical Nevada newspaper editor and ownership swap throughout its publication history until its suspension on January 22, 1932. See Lingenfelter and Gash, *Newspapers in Nevada*, 288-89.

The Piper Brothers' Business of Amusements: Piper's Corner Bar

CAROLYN GRATTAN EICHIN

One contemporary described John Piper as “not only a speculative manager, but also a hotel-keeper, seems like-wise to have been a shrewd, hard, unscrupulous person, not, however, devoid of rough kindness.”¹ Another called him “a gentleman of great probity and shrewdness.”² Arriving in Virginia City in late 1860, Piper established a saloon, purchased an opera house, served in various political positions locally and at the state level, and had several business interests during a long career in the mining town. But he had help from an array of relatives and friends, and employed a number of strategies that support the characterization of him as shrewd. The examination of this particular saloon may provide insight into the business model that facilitated its success, and may illuminate an example to which other business comparisons can be made. In many ways, this saloon operation exemplified the family-run immigrant business experience.³

The great Comstock mining boom made Virginia City the elegant interior partner of San Francisco. “Virginia City is to Nevada what San Francisco is to the Pacific Coast.”⁴ The cosmopolitan atmosphere and large population demanded amusements of the scale experienced in San Francisco or eastern cities. The Piper brothers, three immigrants from Prussia, brought amusements to the Comstock, prospered during the boom years, and suffered with the Comstock’s decline.⁵

Carolyn Grattan Eichin holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in history from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. While completing the course work for a PhD in the history of the American west, Carolyn published articles in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* and *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*. Carolyn’s interest in Nevada stems from her seventeen-year career as an adjunct faculty member for the Community College of Southern Nevada where she taught American history, Nevada history, and anthropology. An article in the *Mark Twain Annual* on Twain’s nom de plume connection with Virginia City is scheduled for publication in November 2014.

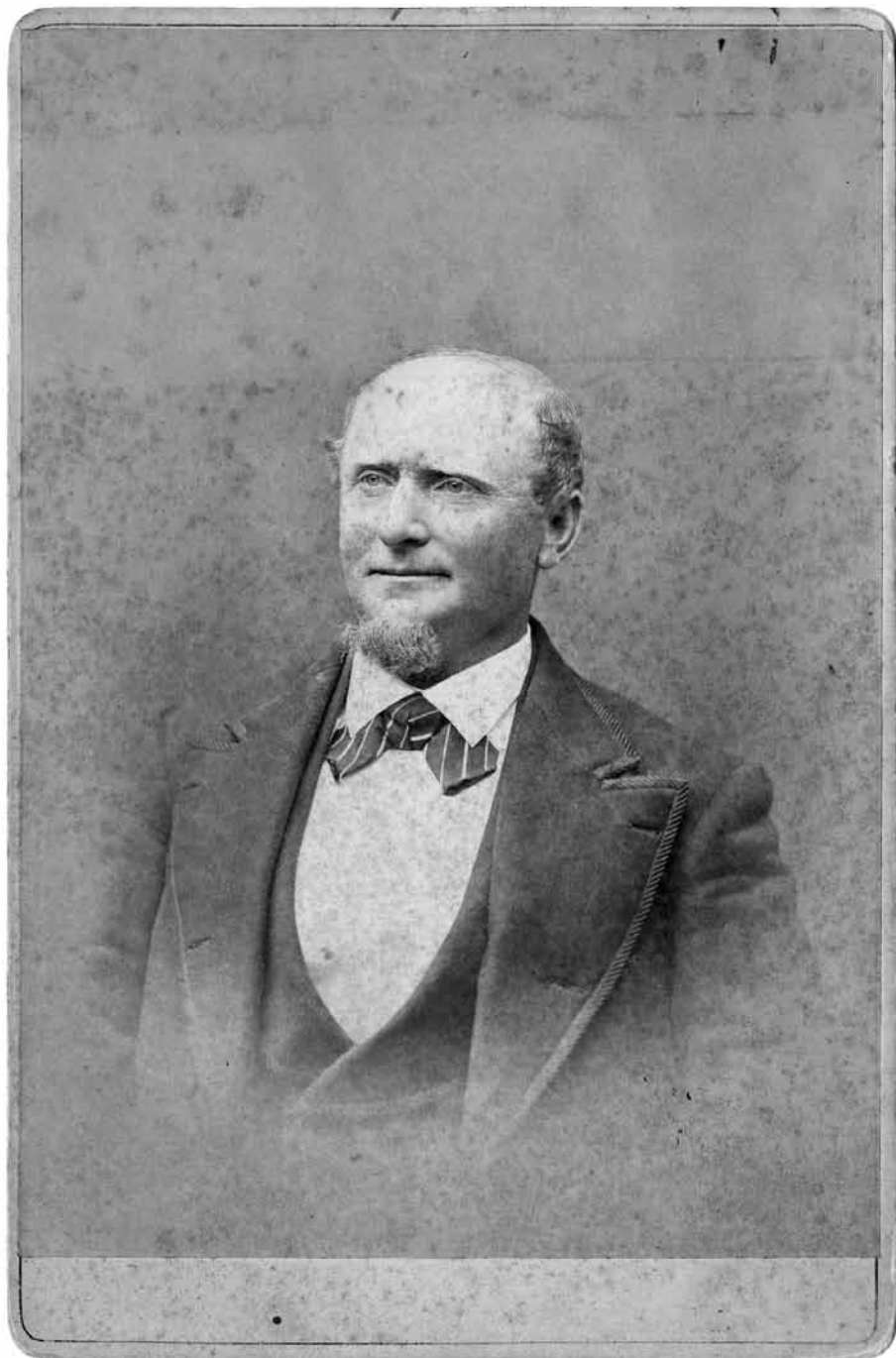
Nevadans remember John Piper because of the Opera House on B and Union Streets. The building now standing, the third such structure with which he was involved, was finished in 1885 and has served as a museum, events location, and place of interest throughout the twentieth century. During the ensuing years a mythology has developed as to Piper's significance as a theater manager and figure of national importance. If not for the building, Piper would have faded into obscurity as just another local businessman. Moreover, knowledge of Piper as a theater manager spread throughout the country only as the serialized life of actor/manager David Belasco appeared in *Hearst Magazine* in 1914 and 1915, with an account of Belasco's wild experiences as a stock company player at Piper's Opera House before the Great Fire of 1875.⁶ The present article illuminates Piper's saloon business, and expands on an understanding of the Piper brothers' place in local history as members of Virginia City's German community.

John, Joseph, and John Henry Piper (later to be known as Henry) immigrated to San Francisco sometime in the mid 1850s. Henry Piper's son, Charles, said the brothers "were due to be called up for the German army and they wanted nothing of soldiering, so they slipped aboard an America bound ship."⁷ The brothers were born in the town of Fischerhude, now in northwestern Germany, to Joachim and Gesche Peper, who had eight children.⁸ The youngest child, named John Henry, had older brothers named Hinrich (Henry) and Johann (John), a fact that has no doubt caused confusion for researchers.

Upon arriving in San Francisco, John, Joseph, and Henry established and ran grocery businesses. Early business directories place a J. Piper and Joseph Peper in San Francisco as early as 1856, while both John and Joseph appear as grocer and fruit seller, respectively, as early as 1859.⁹ More than ten years younger than John, Henry probably clerked in his older brother's grocery store in 1860.¹⁰ Charles Piper recalled that the Piper's Market was located at New Montgomery and Stevenson Streets.¹¹ Early directories place Joseph Piper's fruit store at either 130 or 132 Montgomery Street.¹²

The 1860 San Francisco business directory listed John as selling liquors, as well as grocery products, so it seems logical that the Piper brothers would have entered the saloon business in booming Virginia City.¹³ Joseph Piper remained in San Francisco and continued the grocery/liquor business until about 1870, when he, too, moved to Virginia City.¹⁴ The Piper brothers were not among the first wave of pioneers to Virginia City.¹⁵ They established what was to become one of the longest continuously operating nineteenth-century saloons in Virginia City.¹⁶ During its long life, the Old Corner saloon at B and Union became Piper's Saloon, Piper's Corner, Henry Piper and Co., Piper Brothers Saloon, and Piper's Opera House Sample Rooms as it changed management.¹⁷

Virginia City may have been attractive to the Pipers because of the large number of German immigrants living there. Virginia City hosted two German newspapers, one of which was located near Piper's Opera House in the early



Portrait of John Piper, owner of Piper's Opera House, Virginia City, ca. 1870s. Cabinet card. Photograph by C. L. Cramer, San Francisco. (*California Historical Society, de Young Collection, CHS2013.1085*)



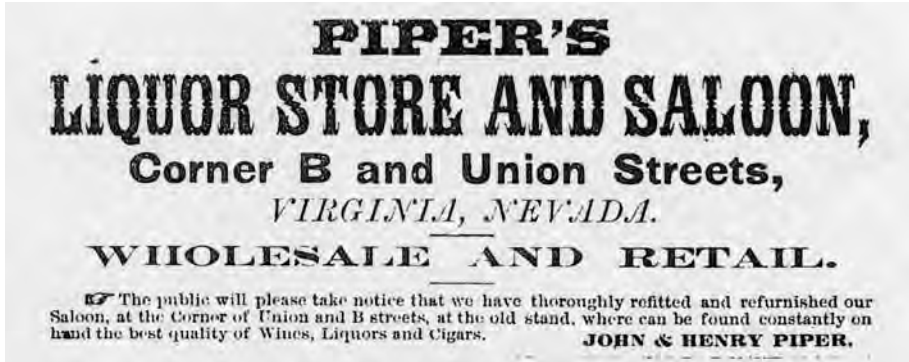
Portrait of J. Henry Piper. (*Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno*)

1870s.¹⁸ The Piper family participated in the German Turnverein, and helped with the organization of German festivals.¹⁹ Germans seemed to dominate the saloon and beer-hall business in the American West. The 1870 census showed 112 saloonkeepers and barkeeps listed for Virginia City, 65 percent of them foreign born. Ireland and Germany dominated with 39 percent. German-speaking countries (Germany, Prussia, Bavaria, Austria) gave a total number of 25 saloon workers, for a percentage of 22.3 percent, slightly more than the next highest percentage, Irish at 20 percent.²⁰

Advertisements in the *Territorial Enterprise* for the Old Corner Saloon date to as early as 1861, with J. Piper inviting old and new friends to partake in "the best liquors and cigars in the market."²¹ Deeds from the early 1860s show John Piper bought lots on the west side of B Street at the Union Street corner. Among the lots at this location was the first Magnolia Saloon, but whether John Piper actually purchased the original Magnolia Saloon or merely purchased the adjacent lot is unclear from the extant deeds.²² During the 1860s and 1870s, the name would appear in Virginia City, associated with a saloon on C Street. The Old Corner Saloon and other structures owned by Piper were lost in the fire of 1863: One newspaper reported not only that J. Piper lost six houses between A and B streets for a total of \$9,000, but that that was the greatest number of houses lost by an individual.²³ An indication of the use of these houses may be inferred from the Board of Aldermen's meeting a few days before. The aldermen passed an ordinance restricting houses of ill fame to an area of the city on D Street north of Sutton, due to the existence of "the many nuisances...in a central part of town."²⁴ By the early 1860s John was listed with his Old Corner Saloon at 1 North B Street,²⁵ but by 1864 one directory showed John Piper to have the Piper Saloon at B and Union, and Jno. Piper to be a saloon proprietor.²⁶

Writing in 1877, the *Eureka Daily Sentinel* editor George Cassidy claimed that John Piper's 1860s saloon on B Street was a local haunt of Samuel Clemens, local bohemians, and other lesser-known writers. "Piper conducted a cash business and refused to keep any books. As a special favor, however, he would occasionally chalk down drinks to the boys on the wall back of the bar."²⁷ At Clemens's request, John marked two drink orders at a time. Clemens's "invariable parting injunction to Piper was to 'mark twain,' meaning two chalk marks, of course," according to Cassidy.²⁸ The term mark twain was also a riverboat signal for safe water, and the basis for the more well-known story of the origin of the nom de plume. Irrespective of the differing stories of Clemens's pen-name origin, the *Sentinel* article provides detailed information about the saloon operation and patrons.²⁹

The Pipers expanded their role in Virginia City in 1867 when John purchased Maguire's Opera House on D Street. By September of that year Henry was considered a partner in the opera house business. Advertisements from 1868 also show John and Henry as partners in the B Street saloon.³⁰ By

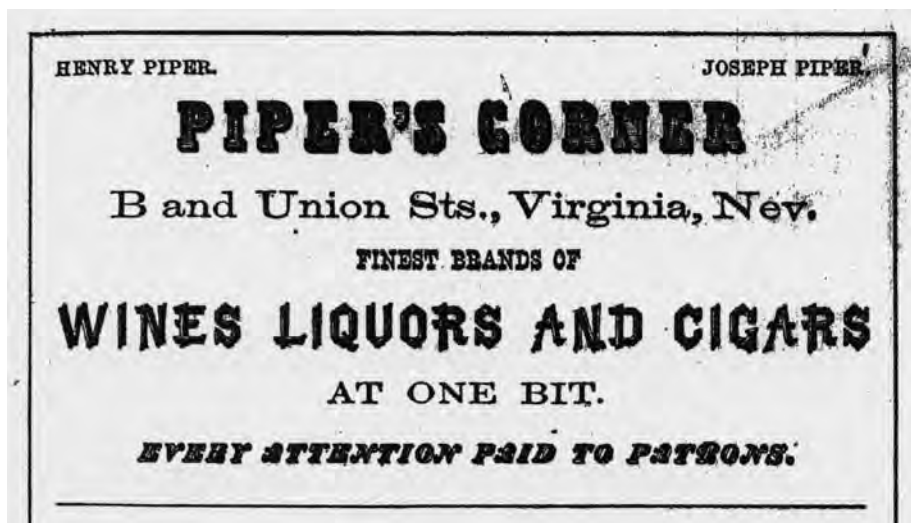


Advertisement from William Gillis, *Nevada Directory for 1868-69* (San Francisco: M.D. Carr and Comp. book and job printers, 1868).

1871, with Joseph and his family moving to Virginia City, the saloon became the business of the two younger brothers. A civil lawsuit against Henry and Joseph provided the information that the two were doing business as “Henry Piper and Company.”³¹ Henry may also have managed the saloon at the opera house on D Street.³²

By 1865, the corner saloon became the anchor for Piper’s Building at the corner of B and Union, which housed the offices of five attorneys, two doctors, and one real-estate agent.³³ Probably reflecting their business success, Henry and Joseph made an attempt to expand their saloon enterprise. In 1872, Joseph and Henry are listed in an advertisement for the Piper’s Corner Saloon on B and Union and the Piper’s Branch Saloon on C Street, at the location of the current Delta Saloon.³⁴ By that August, the Delta Saloon, under E. H. Manuel, had purchased the Piper’s Branch Saloon.³⁵ Advertisements continued into the 1870s, with Henry and Joseph at Piper’s Corner at B and Union Streets.³⁶

Several reasons may explain the success of the saloon business at the corner of B and Union, including the use of relatives as bartenders. Assuming a cash business, the employment of relatives would seem to reduce pilfering by bartenders.³⁷ A nephew of Henry’s, J. H., worked as “barkeep” (bartender) and lived with the family in 1880.³⁸ Other relatives or close friends who tended bar at the Piper’s Corner Saloon included Dick Berman as well as August Piper and John Rosenbrock, both of whom also were affiliated with Virginia City’s Magnolia Saloon.³⁹ Jerry Piper, who may have been August Piper with a more American-sounding nickname, was identified as John Piper’s cousin, and an old barkeep at the time of his death.⁴⁰ A Dick Berman, also a native of Germany, was later associated with Virginia City’s Alhambra theatre.⁴¹



Advertisement from John D. Bethel, *A General Business and Mining Directory of Storey, Lyon, Ormsby, and Washoe Counties, Nevada* (San Francisco: Francis and Valentine Printers, 1875).

The October 13, 1868, *Territorial Enterprise* discussed Henry Piper and John Rosenbrock as standing in for the regular bartender at Piper's saloon.⁴² A few years later, Henry Piper served as the assignee for the bankruptcy case of brothers John and Henry Rosenbrock.⁴³ John Rosenbrock, also from Fischerhude, tended bar for the Pipers in the 1860s, perhaps learning skills he would later use at the Magnolia Saloon on C Street.⁴⁴ A German visitor's description of the Magnolia Saloon provides the framework for the importance of gambling to the saloon tradition. Gambling was another money-making amusement of the Piper bar. The German visitor found:

At gaming tables ranged along the walls and under dreadful pictures, patrons try their luck at cards and dice, at keno, diana, roulette, cassino, chuck-a-luck, old sledge, poker, and classical faro. Most popular is faro; guests flock to it and always crowd around the long table with the sticky, dirty cards.... Virginia City boasts more than a dozen of these public casinos; and the dissoluteness rampant in each, every night is without parallel on earth.⁴⁵

The Pipers' considerable business skills were challenged by Virginia City's Great Fire of 1875, which devastated the opera house on D Street and the Piper's Corner Saloon of Henry and Joseph, valued at \$6,000.⁴⁶ The *Territorial*



Piper's Opera House, 1878. Original Carleton Watkins stereopticon. (*Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley*).

Enterprise noted the rapidity with which the saloon was rebuilt, in part because of the ability to re-use the brick walls of the original saloon.⁴⁷ On January 4, 1876, the *Gold Hill Daily News* reported that the saloon at B and Union was entirely renovated and again ready to serve patrons.⁴⁸

The Piper brothers' stated business model for the saloon hinged on the sale of the best quality wines, liquors, and the best Havana cigars for the very reasonable one-bit price.⁴⁹ After the Great Fire, the *Gold Hill Daily News* noted that Piper's Corner Saloon always "bore a good reputation for the superior excellence of the liquors and cigars there to be found."⁵⁰ Modern archaeological investigations of the saloon support the Pipers' stated business model by finding that the saloon was an upscale men's social club.⁵¹

The opera house was rebuilt at B and Union Streets, incorporating the saloon.⁵² Within a few months of opening in 1878, however, John Piper filed for bankruptcy. He complicated his bankruptcy proceedings with a homestead on the opera house, but the bankruptcy court allowed a district court lawsuit to go forward. Testimony from that case indicated that the saloon was rented from John Piper for \$250 per month; Piper had partially secured his construction mortgages for the opera house with the saloon's rental receipts.⁵³

Henry also filed for bankruptcy in 1878, possibly prompting middle brother Joseph's more active role in the saloon business.⁵⁴ Although an 1878 Virginia City directory found Joseph Piper in San Francisco, he appears to have taken over the corner bar at the opera-house location at B and Union streets by 1879, according to the *Daily Stage*.⁵⁵ The owner of the *Daily Stage* (or *Stage*) newspaper may have been John Piper.⁵⁶ The only advertisement in this edition for a bar at the opera-house location (B and Union) was Joseph's, offering special liquor and wine tasting.⁵⁷

By 1880, the advertisements for the Corner Bar at the Opera House appearing in the *Daily Stage* listed John Piper as proprietor and stated that the bar had operated there for twenty years.⁵⁸ That was largely true, but it had operated under various names and various Piper brothers' proprietorships. John may have been responding to Henry's move to another saloon, on C Street. An 1881 directory credited Joseph Piper with managing the bar at B and Union.⁵⁹

An 1883 fire devastated the opera house structure at B and Union streets.⁶⁰ Although two saloons, Piper's Corner and Joseph's Snug, operated at the opera-house location before the 1883 fire, it is hard to believe that John Piper would rebuild the Snug saloon on lot 20 (5 North B Street), which he did not own, and leave the well-known location of the corner bar at the extreme southwest corner in ruins after the fire.⁶¹

Rebuilding at the same location, the opera house re-opened on March 6, 1885, with a grand ball and benefit for John. Tickets were available at "Piper's Corner" saloon for this event, indicating a saloon named Piper's Corner, both before, and rebuilt, after the 1883 fire.⁶² The saloon continued after the fire of 1883, until 1896. Receipts for numerous liquors and saloon goods are present in the John Piper papers at the Bancroft Library that date from the 1880s.⁶³ An 1883 newspaper article referenced "Piper's Corner" as John Piper's bar, while 1884 and 1886 directories showed John Piper as manager of both the theater and saloon.⁶⁴ Similarly, tickets were available at the saloon, in advance of performances, according to newspaper advertisements in 1885.⁶⁵ Extant liquor licenses for the saloon at the opera house show George Piper, John's oldest son, as the licensee during the 1880s.⁶⁶ George Piper became the legal owner of the opera-house-and-saloon lot in what appears to be a shrewd move, post-bankruptcy, by John Piper, who remained only a manager.⁶⁷

An 1886 business directory listed John Piper at the Opera House with saloon, without mention of Joseph Piper's saloon.⁶⁸ Joseph may have

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 DIRECT FROM COGNAC, FRANCE
 Also Sole Consignees for the Pacific Coast of the following Brands of
Bourbon and Rye Whiskies
 CASTLE O. K. PALACE, BECQUET.
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 CASTLE A. G. ROHRER & CO. BOURBON. SMETT.
 CASTLE. ROYAL MILLER. BOURBON.
 The CASTLE WHISKEY is sold in cases (of bottles and flasks) as well as in barrels. For delivery of Honor and age, it is second to no Whiskey in this Market, as is attested by the constant demand for it and the general favor with which it is received.
 Sole Agents for Chevalier's Ginger Brandy and Crown Bitters.
 San Francisco, Feb 23/89
 Mr. John Piper Bancroft Library
 Dear Sir. Enclosed find receipt for the sum of
 50.00
 Thanking you for the remittance, and soliciting a continuance of your esteemed patronage, we are,
 Yours very truly,
 J. Chevalier & Co.
 The note and intention of remitting balance next month which is satisfactory. Our best regards,
 J. Chevalier

Receipt from the John Piper business papers, February 1889. (Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

abandoned his Snug saloon and worked the remainder of his days in Virginia City for his brother John. Handwritten notes in the John Piper business papers list Joe Piper with other names of persons who appear to be employees.⁶⁹

The Storey County tax assessment records of the 1890s show the saloon to be a viable business, as saloon goods were taxed during the early 1890s and the saloon itself was taxed through 1896.⁷⁰ The demise of the saloon in 1896 also coincides with Joseph Piper's death, on February 2, 1896, in Virginia City.⁷¹

The Pipers' financial success was tied to the over-all mining prosperity of Virginia City, and *borrasca* meant small receipts for the Piper family. In an October 8, 1889, letter to his father, John's son Edward Piper detailed the available cash from the theater and saloon at \$37.00 while only \$25.25 had been sold for the evening's performance.⁷² Thus, in all, John Piper had involved two of his sons, two brothers, a cousin, a nephew, and several possible relatives or friends from the German community in the saloon's operation throughout its long life in Virginia City.

The detailed business agreements among the three Piper brothers are lost to history, but they certainly appear to have operated in unison in making the most of the saloon business at B and Union Streets. In many ways their saloon business exemplified the family-run immigrant business, as opposed to the idea that John Piper's exceptionalism is to be credited for its success. The operation's fluidity reflects the history of Virginia City as a whole, as businesses were born and died with the mining community's booms and busts. The saloon at Piper's Corner lasted from 1860-61 to 1896 under various managements, and with a variety of names, but always as a mainstay of the Piper family. The rapidity with which the saloon was rebuilt after both the 1875 and 1883 fires argues for the venture's economic importance to the family. Similarly, the Piper brothers exhibited trust in members of the local German-speaking population by employing them at the saloon and by supporting German organizations and events. Both John and Henry maintained fraternal organization memberships and political careers, perhaps to further their own financial goals. The opportunities in nineteenth century Virginia City lent themselves to the shrewd and to those who enjoyed support from familial ties and their local community—like the Pipers.

NOTES

¹William Winter, *The Life of David Belasco* (New York: Jefferson Winter Pub., 1925), I, 50. Henry Piper might also be characterized as shrewd. He purchased the property for \$54.62 in a city treasurer's sale, then paid \$100 to the previous owner for the property. Within six months he had sold the property for \$1,000 to another German immigrant. Storey County Deeds, Storey County Courthouse (microfilm copies, Nevada State Library and Archives, Carson City). Storey County Book of Deeds: Book 30:105-106, 375, 586-87; Book 32: 558; Book 35:89-90. See also Carolyn and Christof Eichin, Henry Piper National Register Nomination, Nevada State Historic Preservation Office, for detailed history of Henry Piper.

²M. B. Leavitt, *Fifty Years in Theatrical Management* (New York: Broadway Publishing, 1912), 231. Leavitt based his opinion of John Piper's probity on his refusal to cancel a previously booked act for a more popular one.

³Ron Rothbart, "The Ethnic Saloon as a Form of Immigrant Enterprise," *International Migration Review*, 27:2 (1993), 332-58. Rothbart characterized the "central facet of immigrant enterprise" as "its high degree of embeddedness in social relationships." Wilbur Shepperson, *Restless Strangers: Nevada's Immigrants and Their Interpreters* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1970), 109. Shepperson noted that Nevada "newspapers portray the foreign born as peculiarly original and enterprising in their approach to the business world."

⁴Charles Collins, *Mercantile Guide and Directory for Virginia City, Gold Hill, Silver City, and American City* (San Francisco: Agnew & Deffenbach, 1864-65), 23.

⁵Leavitt (*Fifty Years*, 75-76), placed Piper's Opera House among the top fifty-three national theatres in the United States for the late 1860s and early 1870s. Piper's is the only Nevada theatre mentioned in this list, in which Leavitt erroneously places Virginia City in California. The theatre historian William Winter estimated that in 1880, five thousand professional actors gave theatrical performances on a regular basis in thirty-five-hundred towns in the United States and Canada. He estimated the number of theatrical managers at 365. William Winter, *The Wallet of Time: Containing Personal, Biographical, and Critical Reminiscence of the American Theatre* (New York: Mofat, Yard, and Company, 1913), I, 23. Piper's Corner Saloon re-opened in 2009 at the location of the original saloon.

⁶Gertrude Streeter Vrooman, "A Brief Survey of the Musical History of Western Nevada," *Nevada Historical Society Papers, 1921-22* (Historical Society Papers, III: 117); David Belasco, "My Life's Story," *Hearst Magazine* (June 1914), 767-79. Susan James's article ("Shakespeare and Bear Fights," *Nevada Magazine*, June 2001) presents a balanced picture of John Piper by drawing on his personal life, but discounts David Belasco's experiences as a player in his employ. Belasco's descriptions of theater life are largely believable, as is the detail he provided on Virginia City, in general. He witnessed the funeral of a prostitute who committed suicide after being denied a job as a "waiter girl" at the opera house, and experienced Mrs. Piper in a psychotic episode. Belasco described the clever entanglement that kept him working for Piper. This description prompted William Winter's characterization of Piper as unscrupulous. Belasco's view of Virginia City, "as black as pen can paint," compliments the German traveler Ernst Von Hesse-Wartegg's opinion as quoted in this article. See also Ronald M. James, *The Roar and the Silence: A History of Virginia City and the Comstock Lode* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1998), 208. Historian William Miller credits John Piper's Opera House success to several factors including his ability to buy out the competition, as well as his programming that offered something for everyone, and having the best performers and most popular plays in the country at the time. Piper added gas lights, large heating stoves, building improvements and weather boarding to the original Maguire's theatre on D Street to make it more comfortable for patrons. Varied shows that added to the theatre's success included comedy, male-themed shows starring shapely women, "ladies night," and matinee shows suitable for women and families. The programming appealed to popular fads such as interest in the "can-can" in the early 1870s, celebrities, and the use of state-of-the-art set design and theatrical props. William Charles Miller, "An Historical Study of Theatrical Entertainment in Virginia City, Nevada or Bonanza and Borasca Theatres on the Comstock," (PhD Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1947), 242, 243, 261, 283, 289.

⁷Hal Johnson, "So We're Told," "Theater Man's Son," *Berkeley Daily Gazette* (2 February 1942), p.6, col. 7.

⁸Joachim Peper married Geshe Schlohen on October 19, 1821, and had the following children: Wohler, 1822; Cord 1824; Margarethe 1826; Geshe 1828; Johann, 1830; Hinrich, 1833; Joachim, 1835; Johann Hinrich, 1840. Evangelische Kirche, Fischerhude, Kirchenbuch, 1715-1852; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Genealogical Library, microfilm number 1188972, translated by Christof Eichin. After immigrating to the United States, Joachim became known as Joseph.

⁹Samuel Colville, *San Francisco Directory, Vol. I, for the Year Commencing October 1856, Being a Gazetteer of the City* (San Francisco: Monson, Valentine, and Company, 1856), 173, 176; Henry Langley, *The San Francisco Directory for the Year Commencing June 1859: Embracing a General Directory and Appendix* (San Francisco:

Valentine and Company, 1859), 224. See also, *idem*, *The San Francisco Directory for the Year Commencing 1858: Embracing a General Directory and Appendix* (San Francisco: Valentine and Company, 1858), 226.

¹⁰United States, Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Manuscript Census for the Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920* (digitized at Heritage Quest Online); U.S. Federal Census, 1860; Henry Langley, *The San Francisco Directory for the Year Commencing July, 1860: Embracing a General Directory and Appendix* (San Francisco: Valentine and Company, 1860), 254. See also Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg, *San Francisco's Golden Era* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1960), 147.

¹¹Johnson, 6:7.

¹²Colville, *San Francisco Directory 1856*, 173; Langley, *San Francisco Directory 1858*, 226; *idem*, 1859, 224; *idem*, *San Francisco Directory 1860*, 254.

¹³Langley, *San Francisco Directory 1860*, 254.

¹⁴Henry Langley, *The San Francisco Directory of September 1867, General Directory of Residents and Business Directory, Also a Directory of Public Streets, Public Officers, etc.* (San Francisco: Henry Langley, Publisher, 1867), 405, 415; *idem*, *The San Francisco Directory for the Year Commencing December, 1869: General Business Directory of Residents and Business Directory* (San Francisco: Henry Langley, Publisher, 1869), 502; United States Federal Census, 1870.

¹⁵United States Federal Census, 1860. The earliest Storey County deed that could be attributed to John dates to September 1860 (Storey County Deeds, V:577). The date 1860 is given by Myron Angel, ed., *Reproduction of Thompson and West's History of Nevada, 1881: With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers*, (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1958), 675. John's wealth would be roughly equivalent to \$53,000 in 2009 dollars by using www.measuringworth.com.

¹⁶The term *continuously operating* takes into consideration the Pipers' loss of operation due to fires.

¹⁷In 1862, John and his wife, Louisa, deeded the land on which the Old Corner Saloon stood to the Trustees of Virginia City. However, they reserved all right to remove all buildings and improvements standing upon the lot. As other lots owned by John and his wife bounded the property on the north, it seems probable that the saloon was physically moved north to its subsequent location on the northwest corner of B and Union. Perhaps this allowed Union Street's continuation to the west. The earliest business directory lists the Old Corner Saloon at the southwest corner of B and Union (Storey County Deeds, Book D: 255-56, University of Nevada, Reno, Library, Special Collections); J. Wells Kelly, *First Directory of the Nevada Territory* (reprint: Los Gatos, Calif.: Talisman Books: 1962), 156. During John Piper's bankruptcy proceedings, property descriptions gave him ownership of six feet of land on the southwest corner of B and Union, suggesting the original saloon's move to the north, allowing for the continuation of Union Street and subsequently giving John an unusable piece of property on the south side of Union Street. (Piper, John, Bankruptcy Case Number #325, U.S. District Court, Nv., 1879, Record Group 21; U.S. District Court, District of Nevada, Bankruptcy case files, Act of 1867, 1875-78, boxes 1-15, Federal Archives and Record Center, San Bruno, California). See also the bird's eye view of Virginia City, 1861, drawn by Grafton Brown (Virginia City, Nevada Territory, 1861, drawn from nature by Grafton T. Brown, C.C. Kuchel, lith., Library of Congress). Brown's charming depiction of the early Piper saloon includes the information on the price of drinks at one bit (12½ cents). Ronald M. James and Michael Brodhead's discussion of the map in "Notes and Documents: The 1861 Bird's Eye View of Grafton Brown." (*Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 49:1 (Spring 2006), 52) erroneously lists two addresses for the saloon, one at B and Union and one at D and Union.

¹⁸Richard E. Lingenfelter and Karen Rix Gash, *The Newspapers of Nevada: A History and Bibliography, 1854-1979* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1984), discusses the state's German newspapers; John D. Bethel, *A General Business and Mining Directory of Storey, Lyon, Ormsby, and Washoe Counties, Nevada* (San Francisco: Francis and Valentine Printers, 1875), shows the *Nevada Staats Zeitung* just south of Piper's Opera House on E Street (p.111).

¹⁹*Territorial Enterprise* (5 January 1878), p. 2, col. 8; (14 April 1876) p. 3, col. 1; (10 May 1868), p. 3, col. 8; See also William Charles Miller, "An Historical Study of Theatrical Entertainment in Virginia City, Nevada, or Bonanza and Borasca Theatres on the Comstock" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Southern California, 1947), 442. Miller noted benefit performances at the opera house for the German Sanitary Fund during the Franco-Prussian War.

²⁰Thomas J. Noel, *The Saloon and the City, Denver, 1858-1916* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 53. Noel found that by 1880 more than one third of all Denver's saloons were owned by Germans. Similarly, Elliott West in *The Saloon on the Rocky Mountain Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), found that 30 percent of all saloon owners in his study were of German or Irish extraction (p. 53). Fully 18 percent of saloon owners on the Rocky Mountain frontier hailed from Germany, based on both the 1870 and 1880 censuses (p.152).

²¹*Territorial Enterprise* (20 July 1861), p. 3, col. 3; (17 November 1861), p.1, col. 1.

²²*Storey County Deeds*: Book C: 501; Book D: 6.

²³*Virginia Evening Bulletin* (31 August 1863), p. 3, col. 1. The reporting on this fire was rather limited as the *Bulletin* lost its offices. Total losses from the fire were reported as \$250,000. See also Angel, *History of Nevada, 1881*, which delineates the boundaries of the fire as Taylor to Sutton, from A to B streets (p.598). After the Great Fire, John Piper constructed brothels on the land at the previous Opera House location on D Street. See L. Byington v. John Piper, et al., Storey County District Court, #3372, First District Court, First Judicial District, Storey County Courthouse.

²⁴*Virginia Evening Bulletin* (20 August 1863).

²⁵J. Wells Kelly, *Second Directory of the Nevada Territory* (Virginia City: Valentine and Comp., 1863), 268, 271.

²⁶Collins, *Mercantile Guide and Directory*, 183.

²⁷*Eureka Daily Sentinel* (8 May 1877), p. 1, col. 1. Edgar Marquess Branch, Michael B. Frank, and Kenneth M. Sanderson in *Mark Twain's Letters Vol. 1, 1853-1866* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988) found the first extant use of the name Mark Twain by the author in February of 1863 (p.260-61).

²⁸*Eureka Daily Sentinel* (8 May 1877), p.1, col. 1; Effie Mona Mack, *Mark Twain in Nevada* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 228. Paul Fatout, *Mark Twain in Virginia City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), identifies the editor of the *Eureka Daily Sentinel* as George Cassidy, pp.35-36. See also *idem*, "Mark Twain's Nom de Plume," *American Literature*, 34:1 (March 1962), 1-7. Fatout found other evidence for the support of the story in addition to the *Eureka Daily Sentinel* article. The term *Bohemian* was explained as someone who drank, smoked, and gossiped, in Joseph Francis Daly, *The Life of Augustin Daly* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1917), 43.

²⁹Cassidy lived in Silver City, Gold Hill, and American Flat during the years Clemens wrote for the *Enterprise*. Cassidy's stated reason for the 1877 *Sentinel* column was that he wanted to set the record straight, as Clemens's story on the origin of his pen name omitted any reference to early Nevada. Cassidy considered that "too thin." i.e., incomplete. In a July 1877 letter to his brother, George Cassidy complained at having to write the complete copy for the *Sentinel*, perhaps giving an additional reason for the inclusion of the "mark in twain" story; he needed to fill his newspaper. George Cassidy Collection, University of Nevada, Reno, Special Collections, 98-06, Box 1, Letters.

³⁰William Gillis, *Nevada Directory for 1868-69* (San Francisco: M.D. Carr and Comp. book and job printers, 1868), 43, 58; *Territorial Enterprise* (9 February 1868), p.2, col. 7; (20 September 1867), p.3, col. 3. See also Miller, "Historical Study," 278-79, 287; Edwin Seward Semenza, "The History of the Professional Theatre in the State of Nevada" (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, June 1934), 22; Johnson, 6:7; *Territorial Enterprise* (5 December 1867), p.2, col. 8; *idem*, (16 May 1868), p.3, col. 3.

³¹Mrs. Thomas Taylor et al. vs. Henry Piper and Joseph Piper, July 27, 1878; Storey County, Nevada, First District Court, First Judicial District; Storey County Courthouse, County Clerk's office, second floor, Virginia City. In September 1871, a "woman of the town" Nellie Davis committed suicide in Mrs. Gray's boarding house at 3 S. B Street, rather than return to her previous life as a prostitute on D Street. The deeded owner of this boarding house, located only three doors south of the saloon on the same side of the street, was Joseph Piper, who had purchased it in January from John Piper. *Gold Hill News* (25 September 1871) p.3, col.1; *Daily Alta California* (25 September 1871), p.1, col.8; Marion Goldman, 134, Storey County Deeds Book 30, 459-460.

³²*Gold Hill Daily News* (9 November 1867), p.3, cols. 1, 2. Deeds of the early 1870s show that the Opera-House property on D Street passed back and forth between John and Henry. (Storey County Deeds: Book 30: 81, 147, 459; Book 33: 452-53). Henry held title to the Opera House for more than two years of its eight-year run at that location. These changes in the deeded ownership of the Opera House probably reflect the partnership between John and Henry, rather than a complete change in management.

³³Collins, *Mercantile Guide*, 49, 50, 75, 97, 99, 166, 200, 217, 218.

³⁴*Territorial Enterprise* (23 April 1872), p.2, col. 5. See also L. M. McKenney, *McKenney's Gazetteer and Directory of the Central Pacific Railroad and Its Branches for 1872* (Sacramento: H. S. Crocker, printers, 1872), which uses the name "Piper's Corner" for the saloon (p.547).

³⁵*Territorial Enterprise* (10 August 1872), p.1 col. 7; *Gold Hill Daily News*, (4 January 1873), p.1 col. 7.

³⁶*Gold Hill Daily News* (4 January 1873), p.1 col. 7; also (6, 7, 8 January 1873), p.1 col. 7; (19 March 1873), p.1 col. 7; (19 April 1873), p.1 col. 7; *The Daily Independent* (16 December 1874), p.1 col. 5; (18 December 1874), p.1 col. 5; (23 December 1874), p.1 col. 5; (5 January 1875), p.1 col. 5. There is a slight variation among 1870s business directories of the listed saloon name under Henry and Joseph, which probably means little. The lawsuit previously cited provides the detail that the saloon business was conducted under Henry Piper's name.

³⁷See *Eureka Daily Sentinel* (8 May 1877), p.1 col. 1, for a reference on the cash bar operation.

³⁸See 1880 U.S. Federal Census; John F. Uhlhorn, *The Virginia and Truckee Railroad Directory, 1873-74*, (Sacramento: H. S. Crocker, 1873), 123.

³⁹Walter Van Tilburg Clark, ed., *The Journals of Alfred Doten, 1849-1903*, 3 vol. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1973), III, 2029; U.S. Federal Census, 1880; *Territorial Enterprise* (29 April 1899), p. 4, col. 1; Uhlhorn; 94, 122; Gillis, *Nevada Directory, 1868*; 61; *The Daily Independent* (18 December 1874), p.1, col. 5.

⁴⁰*Territorial Enterprise* (29 April 1899), p.4, col. 1. August's year of birth can be deduced from the Federal Census records, which coincide with the estimated age at death of Jerry Piper.

⁴¹*Territorial Enterprise* (13 October 1868), p.3, col. 2; The U.S. Federal Census, 1870, lists a D. Berman as a restaurant worker from Germany living in the home of a saloonkeeper. It is assumed to be the same person. Marion S. Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners; Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 61, 105. Goldman provides the information that Berman was associated with the Alhambra. After John Piper purchased the Alhambra theater in 1870, Dick Berman was hired to mind the half-dozen women employed there. (Van Tilburg Clark, *Journals of Alfred Doten*, II, 1106). With an entrance on D Street, the dance-hall saloon replacing the Alhambra probably offered prostitution. The *Gold Hill News* believed Berman knew how to run "such a saloon properly," which advertised "pretty girls and lots of fun." *Gold Hill News* (15 October 1870), p. 2, col. 5. By late October of that year, John Rosenbrock took over management of the new saloon enterprise. *Gold Hill News* (31 October 1870) p. 3, col. 1.

⁴²*Territorial Enterprise*, (13 October 1868), p.3, col. 2.

⁴³Rosenbrock, John and Henry, Bankruptcy Case Number #284, U.S. District Court, Nv., 1877, Record Group 21; U.S. District Court, District of Nevada, Bankruptcy case files, Act of 1867, 1875-78, boxes 1-15; Federal Archives and Record Center, San Bruno, California.

⁴⁴Evangelische Kirche, Fischerhude, Kirchenbuch, 1715-1852; Gillis, *Nevada Directory, 1868*, 61; *Territorial Enterprise* (13 October 1868), p.3, col. 2; L. M. McKenney, *McKenney's Business Directory of the Principal Towns of California, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska*, (H. S. Crocker and Co., Sacramento, 1882), 670. Perhaps related to the Piper's, the Rosenbrocks appear to have been closely tied to the family. John Rosenbrock married John and Henry Piper's niece, Catherine Ludolph in 1874. *Gold Hill News* (13 November 1874), p.3, col. 3.

⁴⁵Frederic Trautmann, "Nevada Through a German's Eyes in 1876: The Travels of Ernst Von Hesse-Wartegg," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 26:3 (Fall 1983), 196-206.

⁴⁶*Territorial Enterprise* (31 October 1875), p.1, col. 5; (2 November 1875), p.1, col. 5.

⁴⁷*Ibid.* John Piper's losses totaled \$65,000, conservatively valued at \$1.3 million in 2009 dollars.

⁴⁸*Gold Hill Daily News* (4 January 1876), p.3, col. 3; See also advertisements stating the Piper Brothers were "Back Home Again" on the corner of B and Union (6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 17 January 1876) p.1, col. 6.

⁴⁹See advertisements and *Territorial Enterprise* (29 July 1861), p.3, col. 3; (17 November 1861), p.3, col. 3; (20 September 1867), p.1, col. 4; (26 October 1867), p.2, col. 2; (9 February 1868), p.2, col. 7; (10 May 1868), p.1, col. 5; (13 October 1868), p.3, col. 2; (23 April 1872), p.2, col. 5; *Gold Hill News*, (4 January 1873), p.1, col. 7; (6 January 1873), p.1, col. 7; (7 January 1873), p.1, col. 7; (8 January 1873), p.1, col. 7; (19 March 1873), p.1, col. 7; (20 March 1873), p.1, col. 7; (19 April 1873), p.1, col. 7.

⁵⁰*Gold Hill Daily News*, (4 January 1876), 3:3.

⁵¹Kelly Dixon, *Boomtown Saloons* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005). Dr. Dixon distanced her publication from the historic overview that appeared in the preliminary report and relied on the artifact assemblage to illuminate the saloon's history as a fashionable locale. See also "Archaeology of Piper's Old Corner Bar, Virginia City, Nevada," (The Comstock Archaeology Center, Preliminary Report of Investigations, 1999).

⁵²*Territorial Enterprise* (25 January 1878), p.3, col. 3, mentioned that Henry Piper's saloon at B and Union was being retrofitted, overhauled, and incorporated into the new opera house.

⁵³L. Byington v. John Piper *et al.*, Storey County District Court, #3372, 180; John Piper bankruptcy case #325.

⁵⁴*Bradstreet's Reports for California, Colorado, Nebraska, Nevada, Oregon, the Territories, and British Columbia* (New York: The Bradstreet Companies, January 1879), 28, Key: ii. The report noted that "Piper, Henry and Co. saloon" was in bankruptcy. Regarding Joseph Piper's saloon, it also notes that "in justice to all concerned, subscribers should avail themselves of the reports in the office," a warning that the company might be in financial trouble. Henry Piper's federal bankruptcy papers have not been located. By 1884, Henry is not listed in the annual gazetteer and business directory covering northern Nevada.

⁵⁵D. M. Bishop, *Bishop's Directory of Virginia City, Gold Hill, Silver City, Carson City, and Reno, 1878-9* (San Francisco: B. C. Vandall, 1878), 203; *Daily Stage* (Virginia City: Virginia Evening Chronicle Printing), (26 August 1879), p.1, col. 1. The August 26, 1879, *Daily Stage* is in the possession of the author. This edition of the *Daily Stage* was discovered in the wall between the kitchen and dining room during the restoration of the Henry Piper house at 58 N. B Street, Virginia City.

⁵⁶Semenza, *History of Professional Theatre*, 53. Semenza had the opportunity to interview both John and Joseph's daughters for his thesis. The reference for this information appears to have been John's daughter, Louise Devney. Lingenfelter and Gash (*Newspapers of Nevada*, 266), do not support the claim of Piper's backing or ownership of the paper.

⁵⁷*Daily Stage* (26 August 1879), p.1, col. 1.

⁵⁸*Daily Stage* (22-24 September 1880), p.1, col. 3; (27-30 September 1880), p.1, col. 3; (1-2 October 1880), p.1, col. 3; (4-9 October 1880), p.1, col. 3; (11-12 October 1880), p.1, col. 4; (15-16 October 1880), p.1, col. 3; (22-23 October 1880); p.1, col. 3, (28 October 1880), p.1, col. 4; (3-5 November 1880); p.4, col. 5.

⁵⁹By 1880, a Henry Piper was listed in a local directory with a saloon at 10 South C Street. L. M. McKenney, *Pacific Coast Directory for 1880-81 Containing Names, Business and Address of Merchants, etc.* (San Francisco: McKenney & Co. Publishers, 1881), 204. He maintained that saloon until at least 1882, where he is again listed with liquors at 10 S. C Street (*McKenney's Business Directory*, 1882), 670. Sometime during the 1880s Henry took a job with the Carson City Mint, where he was fired in 1893 for attempting to steal amalgam.

⁶⁰*Territorial Enterprise* (14 March 1883), p.2, col.1; (22 March 1883), p.2, col. 7; John Debo Galloway, "Early Engineering Works Contributory to the Comstock," (*University of Nevada Bulletin*, Publication of the Nevada State Bureau of Mines and Mackay School of Mines, 41:5, (June 1947),18.

⁶¹See also Storey County Assessor's Book of Maps (Assessor's Office), and Virginia City Platt Map (Storey County Recorder and Auditor's Office), which show parcels 19 and 20 were not owned by the Piper family in the late 1870s. See also John Piper's bankruptcy papers, which indicate he did not own Lots 19 and 20 at the time of his bankruptcy in 1878.

⁶²*Virginia Evening Chronicle* (6 March 1885), p.1, col. 4.

⁶³John Piper, Business Papers 1877-1918, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; BANC MSS, P-G 212, Boxes 1-3; Box 1, folders 7, 9,10, 11; Box 3, Folders 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9.

⁶⁴*Reno Evening Gazette* (18 February 1883), p.3, col. 4; R. L. Polk and A. C. Danser, *Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, and Arizona Gazetteer and Business Directory 1884-85* (Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis: R.L. Polk and A.C. Danser, 1884), I, 520; L. M. McKenney, *McKenney's Pacific Coast Directory for 1886-87* (San Francisco: L. M. McKenney, 1886), 895.

⁶⁵*Virginia Evening Chronicle* (6 March 1885), p.1, col. 4; *Virginia Chronicle* (8 October 1885), p.1, col. 4, and (23 November 1885), p.1, col. 4, as seen at the California Historical Society, San Francisco, in Nevada Newspapers, Virginia City folder.

⁶⁶John Piper, Business Papers, Bancroft Library, BANC MSS, P-G 212; Box 3, folders 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9. Polk and Danser's 1884 *Directory*, shows John Piper to have had a saloon and theatre at 1 N. B Street, while Joseph Piper is listed with a saloon at 5 S. B Street (p.520). The Polk and Danser address for Joseph Piper is believed to be in error, as the *Daily Stage* clearly placed Joseph's saloon two doors north of the corner bar. The preponderance of evidence points to the re-built saloon at the corner location with the Polk and Danser directory address of 1 N. B Street. The lot (parcel lot 20) containing the location of 5 North B Street (the address of Joseph Piper's 1880 Snug saloon) was not owned by the Piper family until George acquired it in 1886, according to the Storey County tax assessment records, which begin in 1874. He began paying taxes on parcel 20 in 1886 and parcel 19 in 1890. Joseph's Snug saloon is listed at 5 North B Street in *Daily Stage* (22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30 September 1880), p.1, col. 1; (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 October 1880), p.1, col. 1.

⁶⁷*Storey County Deeds*: Book 49: 341-42, show George to have purchased the opera house (theater lot) and John Piper's home on A Street for \$1,000 from the executors of the estate of Thomas Freehill. Freehill was a speculator and an agent for one of the people who loaned money to John, prior to his bankruptcy, for the building of the 1878 opera house.

⁶⁸*McKenney's Pacific Coast Directory*, 1886; 895.

⁶⁹This interpretation is also consistent with family tradition which placed Joseph as a bartender. Patty Cafferata, personal communication with author.

⁷⁰*Storey County, Nevada, Tax Assessment Records for 1874-1910*: microfilm, Nevada State Library and Archives, Carson City.

⁷¹*Nevada State Journal* (2 February 1896), p.2 col. 3; see also Storey County Certificate of Death, February 2, 1896; Storey County Death Records: Book B, Storey County Recorder and Auditor's Office.

⁷²Edward Piper to father (8 October 1889); Piper's Opera House Archive Collection, Lum Oudegeest Collection, Virginia City.

Disaster in the Workplace

The Las Vegas MGM Grand Hotel Fire of 1980

JAMES P. KRAFT

On the morning of November 21, 1980, at 7:15, fire broke out in a delicatessen on the ground floor of the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. The blaze quickly spread to the adjacent 140-yard-long casino and to ground floor shops, offices, and reception areas. Just as quickly, thick black smoke climbed via the resort's air conditioning system and centralized elevator shafts throughout its three hotel towers, which were filled with tourists, most of them asleep. "When we woke up, we couldn't see a thing," one couple recalled. The conflagration and the poisonous smoke it produced claimed the lives of eighty-five people, making it one of the deadliest hotel fires in history.¹

Over the next few days, the gruesome details of the tragedy came to light. New reports told of bodies piled atop one another in locked stairwells and elevators, and of people trying to scale down the outsides of the hotel using makeshift ropes only to fall to the ground like the heavy pieces of furniture that other desperate guests threw to break sealed windows to get fresh air to breathe. Pictures made the tragedy graphic with images of smoke and flames billowing from the hotel, of terrified tourists huddled on balconies or dangling perilously from the cables of rescue helicopters, of distraught people weeping over dead or damaged bodies of friends or relatives. "An anguished hotel guest grieves over his wife," read the caption below one newspaper photograph.²

James P. Kraft is a Professor of History at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He is the author of *Vegas at Odds: Labor Conflict in a Leisure Economy, 1960-1985* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) and *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution, 1890-1950* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). He has also published numerous articles and book reviews in historical journals.



MGM Grand Hotel fire, 1980. (*Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*)

The news accounts emphasized compelling stories of tragedy as well as survival, and speculated on the actual or potential impact of the fire on the MGM's future and on Las Vegas tourism in general. These were certainly basic aspects of the episode and of its aftermath, and they deserved the attention they received. Another major dimension of the story, however, was then and thereafter relatively neglected, the effect of the fire on MGM employees. The fire was in fact a significant instance of the kind of man-made disaster that represented a notable but little-studied aspect of the insecurity that characterizes working-class life in America. Nine employees lost their lives in the MGM fire: two maids, two room-service waiters, two security guards, a baker, a cashier, and a slot machine mechanic. An assistant to a set designer in the resort's show production, not technically a hotel employee, also died in the fire. Other employees suffered smoke inhalation, some severely enough to be hospitalized, and many more were shaken by what they saw and experienced during the fire and its immediate aftermath. "I can't put it out of my mind," one of the latter group said.³ "It was horrible," another recalled. "I saw people jump. I saw them lying dead on the street."⁴ Some had to have psychological counseling to deal with the experience. "I went to a doctor the following week," one of these said. "He not only gave me sleeping pills but anti-depressants."⁵

The impact of such locally concentrated catastrophes on working people is, as indicated, little studied and thus poorly understood. Fires, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, the collapse of mines, and other natural or man-made disasters have wreaked havoc on countless workers and their families over the course of the nation's history. Like the sudden closure of factories and mines — or automobile assembly plants or dealerships, to use contemporary examples — they have revealed the precariousness of workers' lives. Local disasters have resulted in deaths and permanent disabilities as well as the loss of properties, savings, and family members. They have overwhelmed the resources of private charities and public agencies, even into our own generation when the federal government has assumed responsibility for mitigating their effects. They have also sparked fire-safety reform movements that reshaped work environments in ways that partially compensated for the deaths, sufferings, and dislocations such tragedies caused.

The story of the MGM fire illustrates these patterns and themes. Until the fire damaged it, and closed it for eight months, the MGM was Nevada's largest private employer. It had more than forty-five hundred employees, about a third of whom were on duty when the fire began. Like other workers displaced by disasters, the employees struggled mightily to cope with new problems and challenges. The fire not only obliterated jobs and incomes but disrupted daily routines and strained personal and family relationships. It also threatened or destroyed long-term goals and ambitions, even damaged the mental health of some. To deal with these crises, employees variously turned to their unions and public agencies as well as to their families and friends, with uneven degrees of success.⁶ As a result of the fire, the Nevada legislature passed the nation's most stringent laws concerning fire safety in high-rise buildings, which energized a national fire-safety movement.

At the time of the MGM fire, Las Vegas was a thriving tourist destination. Nearly half a million people inhabited the metropolitan area, more than twice as many as a decade earlier. The area's gaming and tourist economy prospered as the number of tourists increased from about ten million in 1976 to twelve million in 1980. During those years, several large resorts launched major construction projects, among them the Dunes, the Sands, and the Flamingo.⁷ At the same time, the Ramada Corporation boosted the presence of highly capitalized national firms in Las Vegas tourism by purchasing the Tropicana, and other large corporate properties in the industry lifted the confidence of their stockholders by telling them that the city's economic future had never been brighter. A number of new small resorts also sprang up on or around the Strip, including Bourbon Street, the Barbary Coast, the Imperial Palace, the Maxim, and the Marina Hotel.⁸ Collectively, Las Vegas resorts employed more than fifty thousand people in 1980, or nearly a third of the local workforce.

The MGM was the most imposing of these resorts. Located at the corner of the Strip and Flamingo Road, the MGM was part of the business empire of Kirk Kerkorian, who had made his fortune in the airline industry. Kerkorian had financed the resort's construction by selling his interests in the Flamingo and the new International Hotel to the Hilton Corporation and using the proceeds to finance his own publicly traded corporation. When the MGM opened in 1973, it advertised itself as the world's largest resort. Including 2.5 million square feet of covered space and featuring many stunning amenities, it might well have been. Its casino encompassed an area the size of a football field and included more than a thousand slot machines and a hundred gaming tables. The resort's seven kitchens could serve thirty thousand meals a day; its two large showrooms featured star entertainers and lavish stage productions.⁹

The physical setting was magnificent but not fireproof. It had few of what are now standard fire-safety features in high-rise buildings, including automatic sprinklers and smoke detectors. Its ground floor, where the fire started and spread uncontrollably, was filled with furniture and ornamental objects that were especially volatile. The deli's chairs and booths were covered with synthetic materials that emitted large amounts of heat and carbon when ignited. So, too, were the casino's wall and ceiling ornaments, including its large "crystal" chandeliers. The casino's low ceilings and absence of windows were also problematic. Bounded by the windowless casino, the fire quickly consumed the area's oxygen and thus the process of combustion almost ceased. As oxygen re-entered the area through the resort's main entrance, however, it ignited the fire's unburned fuel and gases, causing a massive explosion. To make matters worse, the resort's elevators, laundry chutes, and other air ducts were designed in a way that facilitated the spreading of smoke through the three towers of the T-shaped hotel. Though the towers had six stairwells, only three of them functioned as emergency exits. The doors of the other three could be opened from the inside on the top and bottom floors only. This security feature prevented some guests who fled their smoke-filled rooms from escaping to safety.¹⁰

The MGM also had no emergency evacuation plan. The only directives for evacuating the hotel were posted on a bulletin board in the housekeeping department and thus beyond public view. In any case, they were addressed to employees, not tourists, and directed employees to assemble in a rear parking lot, where supervisors would ascertain that all employees were safe. They also mandated that employees follow "house rules" designed more to prevent fires than to prescribe conduct in case of an actual fire. The rules were trite to the point of meaninglessness. "Take every precaution to prevent fire," one of them read. "Throw all cigarette butts, matches, oily rags, and any other rubbish properly in provided receptacles." "In case of fire," another explained, "the first consideration is the safety of all guests and employees; then attention can be given to fighting the fire." Still another instructed employees to

protect resort property during a fire: "Place loose papers and records in the file cabinets. Close all drawers and cabinets." "Any infraction of these rules may result in disciplinary action."¹¹

Investigators initially suspected that kitchen workers in the deli had started the fire by allowing grease to collect in a ventilator, but they later traced the fire's origins to faulty wiring in the deli's walls. An improperly installed refrigerator compressor, a small cooling device, apparently over-heated combustible material; it thereby created an electrical malfunction that ignited gases emanating from the compressor and thus set fire to the plywood walls. By the time the fire was detected, its accumulated smoke and heat had spread through an open attic above the deli and the casino. As the fire broke through the ceiling of the deli, oxygen rushed through the attic area turning already glowing cinders into flames, which consumed the casino. "It was a classic case of a fire that built and burned," Clark County Fire Chief Roy Parrish explained.¹²

Tim Connors, an engineer making his morning inspections, was among the first employees to notice the fire. As he entered the coffee shop near the deli, Connors heard a "crackling sound." Looking toward the deli, he saw "a sheet of flames running from the top of the counter to the ceiling." Startled by the sight, Connors ran to the nearest phone and called Security. "I told Security they had a fire in the Deli and he asked me if it is bad enough for the Fire Department, and I said, 'Hell yes, roll 'em!'" Connors then broke the glass covering of the nearest fire hose, and with the help of a security guard unraveled the hose and turned the water on. By then, however, the fire was out of control. "I was totally engulfed in smoke," Connors later recounted. Finding it difficult to breathe, he fell to the floor and crawled to safety. "I hit the deck," he explained. "The smoke was intense."¹³

Harvey Ginsburg, a local resident coming to breakfast at the MGM, was one of the first customers to notice the fire. As he entered the casino on the way to the coffee shop, Ginsburg smelled smoke. "I noticed a foggy, smoky atmosphere, especially in the ceiling area of the casino," he recalled. "My first impression was the air conditioning system was not working properly. At this point I did not anticipate that the smoke was a result of fire, since business was proceeding as usual in the casino." As he continued toward the coffee shop, however, he saw flames shooting out of the deli area and people running toward him: "It appeared as though panic was setting in, so I turned around and trotted approximately halfway back out of the casino." For a brief moment, Ginsburg felt safe, but when he turned around he saw fire racing toward him: "The flames had already entered the casino area and appeared to be a swiftly rolling wall of flame reaching from floor to ceiling." Ginsburg ran as fast as he could through the casino, along with a wave of gamblers and dealers. "While I was running other people started to run," he recalled. "Chairs from the blackjack table were strewn in the aisle. I tripped on one of them but still managed to get out of the casino in about 20 to 25 seconds."¹⁴

By the time Ginsburg exited the casino, firefighters were already on the scene. One of them, Bert Sweeny, later described how he and his crew fought the fire. When the men arrived, they saw little evidence of impending disaster. "When we pulled in, there was no rush of people trying to get out of the hotel," Sweeny recalled. "We put on our high-rise gear, walked in through the swinging doors, and went down to the exit-entry ramp to the casino floor." There, however, they saw people rushing toward them, fleeing the thick black smoke in the casino: "We noticed this stratified layer [of smoke], which was probably down about 6 to 8 feet from the ceiling." When the "fringes of flame" turned into a "fireball," firefighters retreated from the casino and set up a "line of attack" beyond the resort's main entrance. As they did so, oxygen that had re-entered the casino ignited unburned gases, blowing the resort's entrance doors open and engulfing the canopy covering the area.¹⁵

With their fire hoses open, the firefighters rushed back into the casino and fought the blaze for five minutes, until their hoses ran dry. By then, other firefighters had tapped hydrants outside the resort and were fighting flames in the casino and the hotel's registration area. Several ran up stairwells into the building's three towers, where they encountered smoke so hot it blistered their face shields. Along the way, they had to step over the bodies of people asphyxiated by the smoke. By the time they reached the floors of the towers beyond the reach of rescue ladders, fire trucks from across the metropolitan area had converged on the resort. Despite this prompt response, it took nearly two hours to bring the fire under control, during which time more than eighty people died, the vast majority of them from smoke inhalation and related exigencies, and another seven hundred were injured.¹⁶

The death toll would have been higher if not for the efforts of rescue workers. The Air Force immediately dispatched nine helicopters from nearby Nellis Air Force Base to airlift people from the resort's roof, where hundreds had fled to escape the smoke and flames. In what they later described as a "dicey operation," pilots maneuvered the helicopters through clouds of smoke and dropped "sling-extracting devices" to lift people into the aircraft. Seven or eight individuals at a time made the brief flight to a landing area adjacent to the resort. More than a thousand people made the trip safely, including a score or more from hotel room balconies.¹⁷

Ambulance drivers rushed more than five hundred people to local hospitals, which found themselves overwhelmed by the crisis. Sunrise Hospital, the area's largest, called in off-duty nurses and other medical personnel to cope with problems, relying largely on volunteers to get patients from ambulances to emergency rooms. Some medical facilities had to turn patients away. "Every bed is full," a supervisor from Valley Hospital told a reporter during the day. "We even had to request four respiratory therapists from our Panorama City Community Hospital in California." Unless patients had urgent

problems—broken bones, serious burns, or heart attacks—most of them were directed to the Las Vegas Convention Center, where paramedics and other medical workers hastily organized a relief station.¹⁸

Other agencies and institutions offered whatever assistance they could. The Clark County School District, for example, provided fifty school buses to transport victims to aid stations and hospitals, and to get unharmed survivors to McCarran Airport. The University of Nevada at Las Vegas provided language instructors to help foreign tourists, and offered shelter to victims in one of its gymnasiums.¹⁹ The Red Cross and Salvation Army helped in the emergency-aid center, contributing bottled water, blankets, and clothing. The Las Vegas Police Department facilitated the flow of traffic along the Strip, which was clogged with rescue vehicles.²⁰

Local ironworkers also played a critical if fortuitous role in the crisis. About seventy ironworkers had been assembled outside the MGM at the time of the fire to begin work on a construction project. Some of them helped firefighters unravel hoses and carry fire-fighting equipment into the resort; others accompanied firemen up smoke-filled stairwells to rescue stranded guests. “My arms and legs were hurting like hell from carrying people, but I couldn’t stop,” one of the latter group recalled. “I carried people out until my arms were too sore to carry any more,” another said. A few of the men saved lives by taking electrically powered “spider cages” up and down steel cables hung along the exterior of the MGM’s east wing, “plucking” people from hotel balconies. The scaffolding on which these cages rested might have collapsed under the weight put upon it. “I went up one time and was told not to go again,” one of the men said. “But when I looked up at the building and saw the faces of those people, scared for their lives, you know someone has to do something.”²¹

An untold number of MGM employees also risked their lives to save others. Daniel Sullivan, for example, a housekeeper, roused dozens of sleeping guests before being forced to leave the hotel for his own safety. “He ran up and down the corridor yelling, ‘Fire,’ banging on doors, hollering ‘Get out! Get out!’” one guest remembered of Sullivan. “He wouldn’t leave until everyone got out.”²² Luke Carr, a lifeguard, helped ambulance drivers and paramedics turn the area around the MGM’s swimming pool into a makeshift hospital, and then assisted them in treating victims of smoke inhalation. Once firefighters had the fire under control, Carr directed rescue units to the upper floors of the resort, where they went room-to-room looking for survivors.²³

Other employees protected their employer’s interests in a number of ways. Two pit bosses in the casino, for example, scooped up money in the cashier’s cage and put it in a fireproof vault before fleeing to safety. Counting-room personnel hastily put money, bookkeeping records, and other valuables in vaults before leaving the casino. A cashier in the coffee shop also pulled the tray from her cash register, which contained more than \$200, and carried

it with her when she left the area. As the smoke cleared, security guards kept would-be looters away from the casino and from abandoned rooms after fire-fighters had extinguished the blaze. They also helped guests retrieve personal possessions they had abandoned in fleeing the burning hotel. Though many guests reported losses of jewelry and cash as a result of the fire, police arrested only one person for looting. The MGM itself lost only a small amount of cash, most of it burned in the keno lounge.²⁴

The fire required the MGM to close for the foreseeable future, and thus to lay off the vast majority of its employees. It destroyed not only the resort's casino but most of its dining areas, lounges, and shops, as well as its administrative offices and registration area. Although the fire caused little damage to the resort's two showrooms, it ruined an assortment of costumes, props, and other supplies upon which showroom productions relied.

The damage was indeed extensive, and may at first sight have appeared more catastrophic than it actually was. Governor Robert List, who walked through the scene of the fire the day after it occurred, compared what he saw to the "bowels of hell." The fire, he told reporters, had reduced the resort to "unbelievably twisted contortions of metal."²⁵ The MGM's three top executives, who were fishing off the coast of California at the time of the fire, repeated the governor's assessment later in the day after viewing the charred remains of the burned-out areas. The resort's casino and adjacent areas had been "gutted," they said at an emotionally charged press conference. Chief Executive Officer Fred Benninger pledged, however, that the resort would be rebuilt and refurbished, but suggested that this would take months. That Benninger expected the rebuilding process to take months rather than years reflected the fact that the resort's basic structure was still intact. For the time being, however, the MGM was closed.²⁶

The closure took place in a national environment of economic contraction characterized at the time by such terms as "downsizing," "outsourcing," and other management innovations generally detrimental to labor. Despite the national economic situation, industry leaders in Las Vegas believed that tourism was largely immune to these economic trends. By the time of the MGM fire, however, that belief was questionable. The area's tourist count had stalled in 1980, and the growth of gaming revenue in Nevada failed to keep up with inflation. As a result, several resorts had postponed construction projects while others discounted room prices, announced hiring freezes, and discharged expendable employees, including dozens of non-union dealers and other casino workers. Small restaurants and motels also discharged workers, which further constricted employment.²⁷ Unemployment in the area rose noticeably, to about the national average of 7 percent, and jumped to nearly 9 percent in the

aftermath of the fire. At the same time, rising inflation exacerbated the problems of workers idled by the fire. Between 1976 and 1980, the consumer price index rose nationally from a discomfiting 6 percent to a punishing 13 percent annually, while oil prices increased dramatically.²⁸

It was under such uncertain circumstances that the laid-off MGM employees pondered their future. "What am I going to do," one of them asked. "What am I going to do?" As such bewilderment suggests, most employees were unprepared for any period of unemployment. They had bills to pay and families to feed, and few resources to fall back upon. "My wife's pregnant and we're hurting," one waiter explained. "I'm frightened," another displaced employee admitted.²⁹ Within the first few days after the fire, workers learned that the MGM would keep on payroll for the time being only about five hundred security guards and a few dozen other workers, chosen on the basis of seniority, to help clean up rubble. All others collected the pay due them and then sought whatever options they could find.³⁰

Most of them filed claims for unemployment benefits. For purposes of processing those claims, the Nevada Employment Security Department divided the laid-off workers into three groups, receiving and assessing the claims of each group over a three-day period. Despite this effort to bring order to the process, the claims office was crowded and chaotic for days. The experience was troublesome enough to inspire several newspaper editorials deploring its delays and inconveniences. "The line at the employment office extended one-and-a-half blocks from the entrance," a frustrated applicant complained to the press, and "the wait outside in the cold wind was two to three hours." The situation inside was worse. "It was a madhouse in there," someone said. "One guy punched another out for stepping in front of him in the line." Some claimants were so exasperated by the situation that they delayed filing their applications until the rush was over. "I'll just wait until next week when things are more quiet and fill out the papers," one of them said.³¹

The benefits that eventuated from this process were helpful but hardly adequate for anyone over any extended period of time, especially a sole breadwinner with a family to support. Like other states, Nevada based unemployment benefit levels on percentages of lost wages, not including tips. For the typical worker displaced by the MGM fire, this meant a weekly check of about \$100, less than a half of what such a worker would have earned. Many supplemented this income with food stamps, which also helped, but workers unaccustomed to the rituals of welfare dependence often found the application process difficult if not demeaning, and sometimes intolerable. At least one woman found it degrading enough to abandon it. "I waited in this line for food stamps, and when I got up there they humiliated me," she recalled. "I told them I would never come back there, even if I starve to death."³² Such words revealed the limitations of the modern welfare state as well as the desperation of many laid-off workers. After major disasters like the MGM fire, the resources of welfare agencies often seemed inadequate, and welfare workers sometimes seemed impatient, insensitive, and even rude.

Two-thirds of the displaced employees belonged to trade unions, and looked to their unions for help. The unions, however, had no means of dealing with all the problems created by the MGM fire. They existed to deal with employer-employee relations, not an industrial catastrophe. As such, the unions had modest strike funds as well as health and welfare programs, but the latter especially addressed themselves to individual needs, not systemic failures. The unions did work to facilitate the relief efforts of volunteer organizations like the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, and helped state and federal agencies in the area of emergency assistance. Their primary contribution to the plight of workers displaced by the fire was to try to help them find new jobs. That was a daunting task. Lines at union hiring halls had been long even before the fire, especially at the "Culinary" (Local 226 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union), to which most of the displaced workers belonged. The nearly four thousand people suddenly thrown out of work overwhelmed the already tight labor market.³³

The diversity as well as the skill levels and experience of many of the newly unemployed added to the problem. Choreographers and performers in the production show *Jubilee*, scheduled to open three weeks after the fire, faced particular difficulties. Jobs in entertainment were especially scarce before the fire, and the sudden displacement of dozens of dancers, musicians, and showgirls, and of the production staffs that made their performances possible, swamped that sector of the labor market. For cast members of *Jubilee*, who had been in rehearsal for weeks, the fire was especially devastating. They had spent so much time at the MGM that they had come to see the resort as their home for the extended period the show was expected to run. "When I saw it on fire, I thought of it as my hotel, my home," one of them later explained.³⁴ Some of the displaced dancers enrolled in exercise classes after the fire to stay in shape.

Janet Ford, one of *Jubilee's* eleven principal dancers, began looking for any job after the fire, even if it seemed monotonous and unchallenging. "You've got to make a living," Ford said. The displaced dancer also filed for unemployment benefits, and received at least a few unemployment checks before finding a temporary job at the Tropicana Hotel, working as a "fill-in" showgirl. Most of Ford's fellow cast members had a more difficult time finding new employment. Some went to northern Nevada hoping to work in or around Reno. Others went out-of-state seeking jobs. "The family is being broken up," Ford lamented ruefully of the loss the fire caused for her and her colleagues.³⁵

The recollections of Jim Bonaventure, a showroom server at the MGM, offer insights into the plight of an altogether different category of displaced employees. With little prospects for a job in the aftermath of the fire, Bonaventure moved to Tonopah, a small town north of Las Vegas, where he found employment building houses. "There was no work right after the fire," he recalled, "so my wife called her aunt and uncle who were in Tonopah, who hired me to help frame houses." The move upended the lives of Bonaventure

and his family. "Tonopah was a major change," he explained. "We lived in a twenty-five-foot motor home, had no hook-up to power for most of the first thirty days, and had to use propane to cook." His two sons remained with friends in Las Vegas for nearly a year, until conditions improved in Tonopah. "It was not a place for the boys to be at first," Bonaventure explained. "After the first month things became more stable."³⁶

As Bonaventure's experiences illustrate, many displaced workers assumed new identities, at least temporarily, after the fire. Those who entered new lines of employment had to adjust to new living conditions as well as new work routines. Even those who landed jobs in or around Las Vegas similar to the ones they lost found themselves in new circumstances with new responsibilities, new co-workers, new supervisors, and new routines, even new working hours. Employees accustomed to sleeping at night sometimes now had to sleep in the day, and vice versa. Accustomed to working at a large, luxurious resort catering to upscale tourists, many MGM employees had to take less exciting jobs in less glamorous places, where the clientele spent less money and left smaller tips.

The experiences of Kathy Griggs, a food server in the MGM coffee shop at the time of the fire, further illustrate this pattern. Griggs had three children and had recently separated from her husband. She found a new job shortly after the fire, but only because a co-worker she ran into at the union hiring hall gave her own job-referral slip to Griggs. "She knew I had kids and she said, 'you know what, they're going to have another job here, so you take this one,'" Griggs recalled. "I was surprised because we weren't like best friends or anything." The referral landed Griggs a job in the coffee shop at Sam's Town, a small resort on Boulder Highway. "At first I was just on-call," Griggs remembered. "I agreed to work whenever they needed me. But they kept scheduling me." Within weeks, Griggs was working full-time on the day shift. She appreciated the job, but her tips were smaller than at the MGM and the work was "a lot harder." "I had to do more manual cleaning at Sam's Town," she said, and "more prep work." Moreover, she had problems with her new supervisor. "She was hard on me."³⁷

Patty Jo Allsbrook, a switchboard operator at the MGM, offered another vivid example of the fire's impact on workers. It took Allsbrook several weeks to find a new job after the fire, and when she did find one it was as a switchboard operator on the night shift at the Riverboat Casino, one of the Strip's smallest properties. "Someone recommended me to a supervisor there," she remembered, "and they called the Teamsters and requested me by name." Working nights changed the daily routines of Allsbrook and her family. "It's not for anybody normal," she said of her "graveyard" experience. "It's a whole new world." She also had her days off changed from Saturday and Sunday to Tuesday and Wednesday, which was equally disruptive. "We couldn't do things as a family the way we used to," she explained. "Tuesdays

and Wednesdays became days for special celebrations.” The changes forced Allbrook’s husband to assume new responsibilities as a parent. He began taking their daughter to school, for example, and supervising her on weekends. “Everybody shifted modes,” as Allbrook put it.³⁸

As these personal stories suggest, MGM employees were active agents in their own history. They found ways of helping themselves and each other, and had at least a few resources to fall back on. Some had enough grit and initiative to leave Las Vegas and find work in new lines of employment. Many called on the resources of their families and friends to deal with the crisis, and sought help from their unions. The circumstances of displaced workers varied enormously. Some had spouses that were gainfully employed and their own homes and savings accounts. Others were single parents who had to rely on workers’ compensation and food stamps after the fire. The woman who gave Kathy Griggs her union work slip because Griggs was a single parent with dependent children is a marvelous story of worker solidarity and self-help. It highlights the complexities of the fire’s aftermath, and the fact that individual workers have always confronted major problems in their own ways.

The MGM fire was a significant if temporary setback for Nevada’s tourist economy. It raised the question of whether any of the state’s now numerous high-rise resorts were safe. Even a small grease fire, it seemed, could reduce the largest and most luxurious resort to ruin and endanger its guests. Public and industry officials acknowledged this problem somewhat grudgingly, while the state’s leading newspapers were suggesting that would-be tourists were viewing Nevada’s resorts as “firetraps.” “We do have an image problem,” state Senator William Hernstadt conceded, though the senator evidently regarded the “problem” as one of public relations rather than public safety. “The public perception is that some of our buildings are firetraps. It’s wrong, and I tell members of the press that it’s wrong, but still that is our national perception.”³⁹

But the perception was not wrong, as the MGM fire had grimly proved. In an effort to improve the image problem as much as to save lives, public as well as industry leaders moved to address the issue directly by strengthening the state’s fire codes for high-rise buildings. Governor Robert List placed himself at the forefront of this movement. Shortly after the fire, List established the Commission on Fire Safety to inspect high-rise buildings throughout the state, assess their safety, and recommend necessary changes in the state’s fire-safety codes. The commission immediately hired inspectors to conduct the necessary investigations, and met eight times within the next three months to discuss their findings and make recommendations. The panel concluded that Nevada already had some of the nation’s most stringent fire codes, but then—to show

how lax “stringent” then meant in this context—recommended establishment of a state commission to evaluate firefighting equipment and procedures for preventing, containing, and extinguishing fires in high-rise buildings.⁴⁰

As the panel completed its work, another high-rise fire underscored the urgency of the problems with which it dealt. On February 10, 1981, a disgruntled and troubled employee started three separate fires in the Las Vegas Hilton, a resort that rivaled the MGM in size and magnificence. Firefighters extinguished two of the blazes before they caused much damage, but the third swept through the eighth floor of a hotel tower, killing eight people and injuring more than two hundred others. In a terrifying re-enactment of the MGM disaster, tourists leaned out windows screaming for help, and helicopters hovered over the Strip airlifting people to safety. The timing of this second disaster could not have been worse for the state and the industry. Reporters from across the country were in Las Vegas to cover Frank Sinatra’s appearance before the state gaming board concerning the popular entertainer’s then controversial application for a gaming license. They therefore covered the Hilton fire extensively, thus focusing new national attention on the problem of high-rise fires in Las Vegas.⁴¹

In the aftermath of the Hilton fire, Nevada legislators finally addressed the issue of the state’s fire codes with the seriousness it deserved. In early 1981, state Senator Joe Neal of North Las Vegas introduced a sweeping fire-safety bill that would make Nevada a leader in a national fire-safety movement. The bill called for state-of-the-art sprinkler systems in all buildings over fifty-five feet in height, and for smoke detectors in all motel and hotel rooms. By the time legislators finished debating the bill, it required such buildings to have devices that shut down their heating and air-conditioning systems during emergencies, as well as exit corridors with emergency lights and doors that shut automatically. Elevators had to be fitted with devices that could automatically recall them to the first floor, and paging systems had to be installed in order to provide people with clear vocal instructions on how to evacuate a building safely. In addition, all areas in buildings used for public assembly had to have interior finishes made of fire-retardant materials.⁴²

The legislation also called for the creation of a new regulatory agency, the Board of Fire Safety, to check architectural designs and inspect construction sites of proposed new buildings to ensure that they conformed to fire codes. It directed the board to evaluate new firefighting technologies and require that the most effective of those be incorporated in new buildings. Developers or building owners who wanted to use alternative technologies had to get the board’s approval to do so. The board consisted of eleven members appointed by the governor, and included a licensed architect, a general contractor, a professional engineer, three fire chiefs or fire marshals, and two representatives of the gaming and lodging industries.⁴³

The reform legislation drew strong support from trade unions, especially those whose members worked in the resort industry. Their concern was workplace safety. In urging passage of the legislation, Vern Balderston of the fire-

fighter's union reminded legislators that lax building codes had caused working Americans untold harm. "When will there be a mandate to implement the installation of automatic fire protection sprinkler systems to stop these needless deaths?" Balderston asked. Such sprinkler systems had already saved countless lives. "There has never been a single fatality in a totally sprinklered high-rise structure." Areas of the MGM Grand fitted with sprinklers, Balderston noted, had suffered little damage during the 1980 fire. "I am convinced that if that building had been properly sprinklered we would not be discussing this now," he concluded.⁴⁴

Resort managers naturally worried about the costs of implementing the reform legislation. Given the sensitivity of the situation and the obvious need to assure tourists of the safety of Nevada resorts, they never opposed it, but they did urge lawmakers to bear in mind the costs they were imposing on buildings, developers, and the owners of existing buildings that had to be retrofitted with the new safety devices. Acting largely through the Nevada Resort Association (NRA), they urged lawmakers to minimize the costs of retrofitting. "One of the problems that any retrofit program has built into it is that there are costs imposed upon the owner without his consent," E. A. Schweitzer of the NRA told legislators. "This creates financial and functional problems that are generally unplanned and can have some very serious detrimental effects upon operating business." "There is a business interruption function on any retrofit program which adds additional costs to the owner," Schweitzer continued. "There are times when your rooms cannot be occupied or there are areas of your food preparation that have to be separated, where you cannot function normally while you are in the process of construction."⁴⁵

Robbins Cahill of the NRA also suggested that the legislation placed an unreasonable burden on property owners. A former chairman of the Nevada Gaming Control Board, Cahill reminded lawmakers that resorts had to obey not only the requirements of the new state safety code but also those of codes adopted by city and county governments, which may be different and more demanding, and expensive, than the state code. How could resorts operate profitably, he asked, if they had to keep redesigning buildings to satisfy local as well as state regulatory agencies? Before requiring that existing resorts install new fire-safety devices, Cahill urged state lawmakers to prohibit local governments from creating retrofitting specifications that differed in any way from those of the state. "There should be some sort of cap on the activities and the ordinances of local governments," he suggested. "If we could just get some restriction of caps and some assurances as to what might happen to us in the future, I think this problem could be worked out."⁴⁶

Such lobbying efforts resulted in a law that reflected the interests of both business and labor. Five months after the MGM fire, Governor List signed the Nevada Fire Safety Act, which not only established the requirements and procedures already noted, but also insisted that city and county fire codes must

be consistent with the state code. Any variation of that requirement had to be approved by the new Board of Fire Safety.⁴⁷ From management's perspective, this provision gave a sense of predictability to the business environment.

Because it was already under reconstruction, the MGM was the first major resort to meet fully the requirements of the law. When it reopened on July 31, 1981, the MGM had an impressive, state-of-the-art fire detection and control system. At the core of the system were two powerful computers, one of which functioned as a back-up unit. Located in the security department behind fireproof walls, the computers helped security workers monitor scores of new life-saving devices, including more than thirty thousand heat-activated sprinkler heads. Two large pumps designed for moving liquid supplied these sprinklers with enough water to prevent another catastrophic fire. They could push sixty-to-seventy gallons of water to individual guest rooms, each of which had at least four sprinklers.⁴⁸

The system had many other component parts. A large electric generator protected the main computers against power outages, new exhaust fans could purge smoke from areas within minutes, and the new air-conditioning system prevented smoke from entering guest rooms. A new public-address system could provide guests with safety and evacuation instructions, and newly installed phone jacks near stairwells could help firefighters communicate with one another. Smoke detectors with audible alarms and manually operated fire alarms were positioned throughout the resort. When fire alarms sounded, stairwell fans increased air pressure to slow the spread of smoke, stairwell doors unlocked automatically, and elevators returned to the ground floor. The MGM even offered guests a short film about fire safety over its closed-circuit television system. Fire inspectors called the refurbished resort the "safest hotel in the world." "You name it, they've got it," Clark County Fire Chief Roy Parrish said of the resort's new safety features.⁴⁹

The majority of the MGM's displaced employees, perhaps three-quarters or more, were back at work when the MGM reopened. "Everybody I knew came back," one of the returning employees later recalled.⁵⁰ Some had returned two or three months earlier, stocking kitchen pantries, installing slot machines, and otherwise preparing for the reopening. Choreographers, performers, and others involved in the production of *Jubilee* had also been back at work for some time, including musicians, wardrobe workers, and stagehands. Most employees who returned to the MGM did so at least in part to keep their seniority and the advantages that it offered, such as preferred work shifts, extended vacation time, and retirement benefits. Some of them had worked for years to get positions that offered premium tips. Kathy Griggs had secured a counter position in the MGM coffee shop for that reason, and returned to the position when the MGM reopened. She and other returning workers believed they had overcome a great challenge. "It's all behind us," one of them said of the dislocation. "This is the day we've been waiting for."⁵¹

The workers expressed confidence in the safety of their new work environment. Before reopening, the MGM had given many of its former employees tours of the new fire-control system. Janet Ford, who returned to her job as a *Jubilee* dancer, learned detailed information about the new system. "We were given a briefing on the fire control computer," she told a reporter when the resort reopened. "It is an unreal computer system. We don't fear being in the hotel." Another employee, Kathy Jungels, had "no hesitation" about going back to work. "From what I've seen," she said of the fire-control system, "it's absolutely fantastic."⁵² Still another returning employee, Eileen Daleness, also saw this silver lining in the MGM tragedy. "We all felt very safe," she later recalled.⁵³

Nevada's experience with the fires at the MGM Grand and the Hilton encouraged officials across the country to address the issue of fire safety. The result was a wave of new fire-safety laws. Tourist-friendly Florida was one of the first states to respond positively to the MGM disaster. By 1983, the state was mandating automatic sprinkler systems and smoke detectors in all lodging establishments more than three stories high with interior hallways. Massachusetts and Connecticut enacted their own retrofit ordinances soon thereafter. Several large cities also adopted similar ordinances, including Atlanta, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Congress eventually encouraged other cities and states to upgrade their fire-safety codes by passing, in 1990, the Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act, which not only required federal employees traveling on business to stay in public accommodations that had sprinkler systems but also charged the federal government with compiling and publishing lists of the nation's sprinklered lodging properties. The act turned corporations as well as public officials into fire-safety advocates. By the turn of the century, major hotel chains like Marriott, Ritz-Carlton, and Hilton boasted of their adherence to modern fire-safety standards.⁵⁴

The result of these developments has been a sharp decline in the number of deaths from high-rise fires. Since 1997, the deadliest hotel fire in the United States resulted in only six deaths (in a property that had no sprinkler system). The vast majority of high-rise fires in the nation have been confined to the rooms in which they started, and were extinguished before fire trucks arrived on the scene. America's high-rise buildings are thus among the safest of walled structures. Only 1 percent of all fire-related deaths now occur in such buildings.⁵⁵

This is not to say that the dangers of high-rise fires have been eliminated, or that vigilance is no longer necessary. There are still more than four thousand fires in American hotels and motels every year, or about ten every day. Most high-rise structures built before the 1980s still lack automatic sprinkler sys-

tems, including many lodging establishments. Elevator shafts and stairwells in those structures still allow poisonous smoke to travel upward through the buildings, as do laundry chutes and other air ducts. Furniture and ornamental objects that feed fires are scattered through many high-rises. Even structures built according to demanding building codes may be unsafe. Sprinkler systems and other life-saving technologies have to be maintained, and evacuation plans effective. As the American National Fire Protection Association recently said of the problem, "a lot more has to be done."⁵⁶

NOTES

¹*Los Angeles Times* (22 November 1980).

²*Ibid.*

³Deirdre Coakly, *The Day the MGM Grand Hotel Burned* (Secaucus: Lyle Stuart, 1982), 118.

⁴Patricia Frymire, interview, 10 March 2008. Frymire, a switchboard operator at the MGM, was on duty the day the resort caught fire.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶On resort workers in Las Vegas, see James P. Kraft, *Vegas at Odds: Labor Conflict in a Leisure Economy, 1950-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010). Also, Hal K. Rothman and Mike Davis, eds., *The Grit beneath the Glitter: Tales from the Real Las Vegas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); and Hal Rothman, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁷*Las Vegas Perspective: 1981*, pp. 3-26, Special Collections, Lied Library, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (hereafter cited as UNLV Special Collections). The *Perspective* is a collection of facts and statistics compiled by the Nevada Development Authority, the First Interstate Bank of Nevada, and the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; and it is published with assistance from the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (hereafter cited as *Review-Journal*). See also Hal Rothman, "Colony, Capital, and Casino: Money in the Real Las Vegas," 327, in *Grit beneath Glitter*, Rothman and Davis, eds.

⁸Ramada Inns, *1979 Annual Report* (Phoenix: Ramada Inns, 1979), 12, Tropicana Promotional and Publicity files, UNLV Special Collections; *Las Vegas Perspective: 1981*, 42-5. Other properties that opened off the Strip include Alexis Park, the Bingo Palace (now Palace Station), and Vegas World.

⁹David G. Schwartz, *Suburban Xanadu: The Casino Resort on the Las Vegas Strip and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 156, 163, 169-70. Also, Robert D. McCracken, *Las Vegas: The Great American Playground* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1996), 95.

¹⁰The only sprinklers in the hotel towers were on the top floor in an area designed for high-stakes gambling. The fire spread so rapidly that it disabled the hotel's manual fire alarm system. "Report of Clark County Fire Department 1981," Sec. V, 14-18, viewable on-line at [http://fire.co.clark.nv.us/\(S\(5jrb2o45oirk3c45kmtaxl45\)\)/MGM.aspx](http://fire.co.clark.nv.us/(S(5jrb2o45oirk3c45kmtaxl45))/MGM.aspx) (accessed 1 July 2009).

¹¹*Ibid.*, Sec. IV, 1-6.

¹²*Ibid.*, Sec. V, 7-18. Also *Las Vegas Sun* (22 November 1980) hereafter cited as *Sun*; *San Francisco Chronicle* (23 November 1980).

¹³"Report of Clark County Fire Departments," Tim Connor statement, 2-6, 1981.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Sec. IX, Harvey B. Ginsberg statement, 17.

¹⁵On fire service response, see National Fire Protection Association, "Investigation Report on the MGM Grand Fire" (15 January 1982), pp. 21-25, UNLV Special Collections.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 26-27; and "Report of Clark County Fire Department," Sec. IX, 22.

¹⁷*Sun*, (22 November 1980).

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Charles Blake, interview, 29 December 2009, Las Vegas. Blake worked at the Las Vegas office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and volunteered his services to the Red Cross during and after the MGM fire.

²¹About half of the ironworkers who participated in rescue efforts were treated for smoke inhalation, and several had to be hospitalized. See Coakly, *Day MGM Grand Burned*, 75-77; *Sun* (23 November 1980).

²²*Los Angeles Times* (23 November 1980). "When the fire started," one security officer later explained, "they [the casino employees] took the money from the cashier's cage and put it in the vault."

²³Coakly, *Day MGM Grand Burned*, 117.

²⁴Interview with Sherry McClaren Walberg, June 17, 2009, Las Vegas. She was working as a cashier at the MGM when the fire broke out. Also, *Los Angeles Times* (22, 23 November 1980); and *Sun* (23 November 1980). Guests reported the loss of more than \$270 million in cash, jewelry, and other possessions as a result of the fire. According to the MGM, the only money it lost in the casino during the fire was a relatively small amount of cash in the keno lounge. On theft during the fire, see *Sun* (24 November 1980).

²⁵*San Francisco Chronicle* (23 November 1980).

²⁶*San Francisco Chronicle* (24 November 1980). MGM executives tried to end the press conference prematurely, and the media shouted at them to answer more questions, which they did. Fred Benninger, Alvin Benedict, and Bernard Rothkoph were the resort's principal managers.

²⁷*Review-Journal* (3 December 1980, 28 April 1983). The state unemployment rate stood at 6.7 percent in October 1980, compared to the national rate of 7.6 percent. The closure of the Aladdin in the summer of 1980 partly explains the high unemployment in Clark County. The Nevada State Gaming Commission shut down the Aladdin for four months in 1980, from July to October, after learning that unlicensed people were running its casino, in violation of state gaming laws. The shut-down threw two thousand people out of work. On the history of the Aladdin and the gaming commission, see *Review-Journal* (11 July 1980).

²⁸On employment in resorts in these years, see *Las Vegas Perspective 1981*, p. 39; and *Las Vegas Perspective*, 1985, p. 76, UNLV Special Collections. Also, "Nevada Economic Indicators," Papers of Governor Robert List, Folder Labor, Box 1180, and Folder 046, Nevada State Library and Archives, Special Collections, Carson City, Nevada (hereafter cited as NSLA Special Collections).

²⁹Kathy Griggs interview, 24 April 2006, Las Vegas.

³⁰*San Francisco Chronicle* (24 November 1980). Frymire interview.

³¹*Review-Journal* (25 November 1980).

³²Griggs interview.

³³On Local 226 at the time of the fire, see U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Unions*, 98th Cong. 2 Sess., 1984, p. 68 (hereafter cited as Senate Report, 98th Cong.)

³⁴*Review-Journal* (28 November 1980).

³⁵*Ibid.* On Ford's experience, see also *Review-Journal* (31 July 1981).

³⁶Jim Bonaventure interview, 5 May 2006, Las Vegas. The maximum benefits the state paid to MGM workers amounted to \$127 a week.

³⁷Griggs interview.

³⁸Patty Jo Allsbrook interview, 14 March 2008, Las Vegas.

³⁹Minutes of the Meeting of the Senate Committee on Human Resources and Facilities, 61st Sess., Nevada State Legislature, 25 February 1981, p. 1, available online at www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/1981/SB214,1981,pt1.pdf (accessed 16 July 16, 2009). At the same site, see the remarks by Hernstadt entered in the *Journal of the Senate*, 61st Sess., p. 563, reprinted on page 50 of the online document.

⁴⁰*New York Times* (13 March 1981); *Sun* (25 January 2008). On the governor's commitment to minimizing the fire's impact, see his letter to Harriet Copeland (29 December 1980), in Papers of Governor Robert List, Box 0837, Folder Fire, NSLA, Carson City.

⁴¹The arsonist, twenty-three year old busboy Philip Cline, was eventually convicted of eight counts of murder, and sentenced to life imprisonment. Journalists have suggested Cline also started the MGM fire, though that was never proved. See *Sun* (11 February 1981). Also *New York Times* (26 March 1982, 20 October 1985).

⁴²See editorial by state senator Joe Neal, who introduced the Senate version of the fire-safety legislation, in *Review-Journal* (23 January 2006). On the initial version of Neal's bill, see www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/1981/SB214,1981pt1.pdf, 3-8 (accessed 16 July 2009). The bill's counterpart in the state Assembly, Assembly Bill No. 505, is available at www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/1981/AB505,1981.pdf, 2-5 (accessed 16 July 2009).

⁴³On the proposed powers and responsibilities of the Board of Fire Safety, see Assembly Bill 505, at www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/1981/AB505,1981.pdf (accessed 16 July 2009).

⁴⁴Testimony of Vern Balderston, in Minutes of the Nevada State Legislature, Assembly Committee on Government Affairs, 6 May 1981 (hereafter cited as Minutes of State Legislature, 6 May 1981) available online at www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/1981/SB214,1981pt2.pdf, pp. 144-146 (accessed 2 August 2009).

⁴⁵E. A. Schweitzer testimony, in Minutes of State Legislature, 6 May 1981. See www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/1981/SB214,1981pt2.pdf, pp. 154-58 (accessed 2 August 2009).

⁴⁶Robbins Cahill testimony, Minutes of State Legislature, 6 May 1981, www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/1981/SB214,1981pt2.pdf, pp. 154-56 (accessed 2 August 2009).

⁴⁷*Sun* (25 January, 1981).

⁴⁸Nearly 2,000 sprinkler heads were in the ceiling of the MGM's newly expanded casino, now the largest in Las Vegas. *Reno Evening Gazette* (30 July 1981); *Nevada Appeal* (30 July 1981).

⁴⁹*Valley Times* (30 July 1981); *Los Angeles Times* (30 July 1981).

⁵⁰Cathy Beane interview, 17 June 2009, Las Vegas.

⁵¹The words are those of Rosalie Manganelli, a hostess in the MGM delicatessen who narrowly escaped the fire, as quoted in Coakly, *Day MGM Grand Burned*, 189-91. Jim Bonaventure, Kathy Griggs, and Patty Jo Allsbrook returned to work at the MGM.

⁵²*Review-Journal* (30, 31 July 1981).

⁵³Eileen Daleness interview, 17 June 2009, Las Vegas.

⁵⁴The U.S. Fire Administration compiled and published the list of buildings that had sprinkler systems. See *USA Today* (20 November 2005), www.usatoday.com/money/biztravel/2005-11-20-hotel-safety_x.html (accessed 15 August 2009); and "Retrofit Fire Sprinkler Program—A Partial Listing," www.nfsa.org/info/retrofit.html (accessed 15 August 2009).

⁵⁵*USA Today* (20 November 2005), www.usatoday.com/money/biztravel/2005-11-20-hotel-safety_x.html (accessed 15 August 2009); and "Life Safety Laws: Sprinklers in High-Rise Buildings," Institute of Real Estate Management (January 2005), www.ccim.com/members/govaffairs/pdf/Life_Safety_Laws (accessed 20 August 2009).

⁵⁶The problem of fire safety looms large in other parts of the world, including Europe. According to fire-safety experts, there are fewer than one hundred large hotels in the United Kingdom with automatic sprinkler systems, and fewer still in Germany, France, and other European nations. See *USA Today*, (20 November 2005), www.usatoday.com/money/biztravel/2005-11-20-hotel-safety_x.htm (accessed 20 August 2009).

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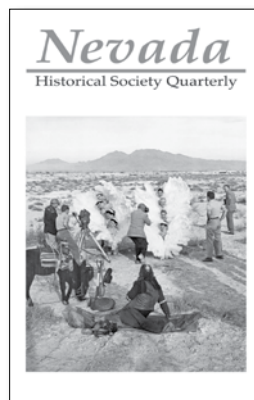
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Nevada Historical Society Quarterly Call for Papers

Themed Issue—Thinking Beyond Nevada’s Borders

Submission Deadline: October 1, 2015

The Nevada Historical Society Quarterly is seeking articles for an issue that addresses the theme of the 10th Biennial Nevada Historical Society Conference: “Thinking Beyond Nevada’s Borders.”

Two trends in the study of American history have opened up exciting new avenues of research, and both involve a look beyond traditional borders. In our increasingly globalized world, it is no surprise that scholars have begun to think of history beyond the nation-state and to think more broadly about regional, hemispheric, or even global historical events and ideas. A second new approach to American history – a look at “borderlands” or places between borders where political control as well as all aspects of society and culture are in flux – is another view that seeks to look beyond traditional borders in ways that make us rethink aspects of the master narrative of American history.

For this “Thinking Beyond Borders” issue, then, the NHSQ invites articles that do not stop at Nevada’s state border but rather place Nevada’s history in an international context or look closely at moments when these borders were undecided, uncertain, and ambiguous.

Instructions for Submissions and Abstracts

Please send paper proposals (abstracts) to the editor-in-chief, John Reid, (jreid@tmcc.edu) before submitting a completed paper. Full manuscripts should be sent in electronic form to the editor by October 1, 2015, and should be between 4,000 and 7,000 words. Earlier submissions are welcomed. Participation in the 10th Biennial NHS Conference is not required.



Thinking Beyond Nevada's Borders

THE 10TH BIENNIAL NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
CONFERENCE—MARCH 2015

Too often, historical analysis ends at national borders. American history has tended to stop at the Canadian and Mexican borders. Or historical narratives will identify the end of a Native American homeland when a line is drawn on a map, regardless of the situation on the ground.

Increasingly, historians are realizing the limits that this thinking places on our understanding of the past. As Thomas Bender has written, a focus on the nation-state as the center of history has “obscured the actual experience of national societies and has produced a narrow parochialism.” As a result, historians are focusing more on the interrelationships between the history of the United States and events and ideas that are not contained within national borders.

A second direction in American history scholarship is known as borderlands history. It, too, strives to reconsider the role of borders, but in this case, the focus is at the edges of political structures, economic systems, or even cultures. This is not frontier history. In the words of Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, “If frontiers were the places where we once told our master American narratives, then borderlands are the places where those narratives come unraveled.... If frontiers are spaces of narrative closure, then borderlands are places where stories take unpredictable turns and rarely end as expected.”

In keeping with these trends, the theme of the 10th Biennial Nevada Historical Society Conference is “Thinking Beyond Nevada’s Borders.” How can we reveal Nevada’s interconnections with the wider region, the nation, the hemisphere, or even the globe? And what about those historical moments at the edges of Nevada’s borders? How can we use this fresh lens of borderland history to reveal moments of “spatial mobility, situational identity, local contingency, and the ambiguities of power,” moments when the Nevada’s future was anything but certain?