



Freight depot at Reno, 1860s

Chapter 5: Washoe County - Reno and vicinity

Although it is probable that some of the American trappers that penetrated into this region as early as 1832 may have traversed the country now embraced within the limits of this county, yet there is no record of any visit prior to that of Lieutenant Fremont, on his second exploring expedition. He came down from Oregon through Roop County [Nevada], and, on the tenth of January, 1844, discovered and named Pyramid Lake, and on the fifteenth came to the mouth of the Truckee River, which he named Salmon Trout River.

Though not the earliest settled portion of the State, still Washoe Valley was known and Truckee Meadows were known by the earliest emigrants, those that passed through to California

Dear Mary,

...there was no grass for sixty-five miles and but one spring, a mile off the road, where water could be had for the cattle; in short, we were on the desert and drove the whole distance without feeding our cattle, and no water except at the commencement. Our train was the fourth that had taken the road, and I counted on the last thirty miles fifty oxen dead from exhaustion on the desert.

Alonzo Delano, 1849



Dear Mary,

...A man deserves to be well paid who makes his first overland journey to California, for he can form no idea of the many trials he may be subjected to. The fatigues of the journey--the hardships of traversing an almost barren wilderness of nearly two thousand miles, I care but little for; but it is the narrow-minded ribaldry--the ceaseless strife which is constantly marring the tranquility of such a crowd--a mass of men in which each individual acts independent of all the rest, caring for none but himself, which renders it almost insufferable.



Alonzo Delano,
Lawson's Settlement,
California, September
18, 1849.



Library of Congress

Wells Fargo stagecoaches being loaded at Cisco Station in 1867. The passenger station and Wells Fargo office were next to the main line. Until completion of the Summit Tunnels in 1868, stagecoaches and freight wagons loaded here for Virginia City and the Comstock mines.

prior to the gold discovery; subsequent to that event, thousands passed up the valley or followed up the winding course of the beautiful Truckee, stopping for a few days of rest, and to permit their jaded and half-famished stock to recruit upon the rich grass that grew so luxuriantly along the water-courses.

Upon this they feasted and fattened until spring, when they were able to easily pull their loads across the intervening mountains to the goal their now impatient masters were so eager to reach.

It will be observed that the spelling of the name of the valley was different from that in vogue at present, and is, no doubt, the more proper; the well-known faculty of the heedless miners of corrupting foreign or un-English words into a similarity to English, having, as soon as the great influx of strangers set in, changed Wassau to Washoe.

Passing by these transient sojourners, it is found that no actual settlement was made until 1852, when a man named Clark built a little cabin in a lovely spot near the present site of Franktown.

The first permanent settlement in the Truckee Meadows was made by a Mormon named Jamison, who came up from

Carson Valley in 1852, and established Jamison's Station, on the Truckee River, where he traded with the emigrants, buying their lean and exhausted stock, or trading good cattle for them. The poor cattle which he bought were quickly fattened and put in good condition by the rich grass that skirted the banks of the beautiful stream. Arriving at this station and others established on the various routes of travel, footsore and weary from their long tramp across the alkali desert, their provisions nearly exhausted, their cattle jaded and useless from overwork and lack of nourishment, the emigrants were able to lay in provisions for the balance of their journey, and to procure good cattle to replace those unfitted for further use, or whose bones lay whitening on the scorched sands of the desert.

In June, 1854, the company of Mormons, headed by Elder Orson Hyde, arrived in Carson Valley, and in the summer of 1855, Alexander Cowan and wife, now Mrs. Sandy Bowers, came to Washoe Valley, and purchased the Bowers Ranch of Dodge & Campbell. Elder Hyde was pleased with the location, and commenced the erection of a saw-mill at Franktown, as the little center of the settlement was named. In 1856 another

The Riverside Hotel (photo 1903) sits on the exact location where Reno began in 1859. C.W. Fuller operated a log building here that provided food and shelter to gold-seekers who were passing through the area in the reverse gold rush called the "Rush to Washoe." Myron Lake owned the property from 1861 into the 1880s, running consecutive hotel businesses under the name Lake's House. After Lake's death, his daughter and son-in-law operated the hotel and renamed it the Riverside. A subsequent owner, Harry Gosse, converted the small frame building into a lavish brick hotel, retaining the name Riverside. This version was destroyed in a fire.

Extensive logging operations are conducted along the Truckee, and it is one of the sights of the trip to witness the shooting of the logs along timber-ways for one thousand two hundred feet down the side of the ridge. They make the descent in thunder and smoke, and each log, as it strikes the water, will send up a beautiful column of spray a hundred and fifty feet, resembling the effect of a submarine explosion.

Benjamin Parke Avery, 1850s

