

THE AMADORIAN

A Publication of the Amador County Historical Society
"Freserving the past and present for tomorrow"

Summer 2021 – Vol. 14, No. 2

President's Corner

Dear Fellow ACHS Members:

I'm very pleased that we are finally taking a real leap forward. The plans for our annual Wine and Cheese event at the Museum, scheduled for September 17, 2021, are proceeding along nicely. Please see the flyer in this issue about the event. The first steps for our annual membership meeting on November 7, 2021, have also begun. Let's get out and enjoy these events. Mark them on your calendar now!!

The museum and mine model are now open again. If you haven't seen them in a while, they are well worth the visit. The Amador Central Railroad is offering rides again, also. You can check their website, amadorcentralrailroad.com, for information on dates, times, and reservations.

We are still working on the plans for a joint venture with other historical sites in the county to be called "Amador History Passport." I will be sending out information for this when we finalize the details.

In the meantime, have a great summer and hope to see everyone at the Wine and Cheese Event on September 17, 2021.

Best regards,

Cathy McGowen,
President
Amador County Historical Society



Save the Dates:

- Friday, September 17, 2021Wine and Cheese TastingEvent
- Sunday, November 7, 2021Annual Membership Meeting

A Blast from the Past

A HISTORY OF THE 1859 BROWN HOUSE WHICH BECAME HOME TO THE AMADOR COUNTY MUSEUM IN 1949: The 1950 Centennial copy edited and revised by Judy Jebian in 2021

In 1849, Armstead C. Brown, age 33, joined a wagon train bound for California. Brown arrived first in the area of Shasta where he successfully engaged in placer mining. Exploring south to Jackson in 1850, he liked what he saw and resolved to make it his home, but his wife and six children were still in Wisconsin. Brown returned to Potosi, Grant County, Wisconsin, in the fall of 1850 by way of the Isthmus of Panama, which was the quick route of about 3 months. The journey from San Francisco meant taking a ship south to Panama, crossing the 60-mile isthmus in about four days by boat and mule, waiting for a ship to New Orleans and finally traveling up the Mississippi River by riverboat to his family. How happy they must have been to see him after more than two long years!

Brown crossed the Plains again with his wife Philippia and their six children by covered wagon in that hazardous 4-month journey, arriving at Jackson in the fall of 1851. He built their first home on the second lot just down from North Street on the East side of North Main. Then, with his older sons, Armstead Jr. and James, he established a freight business that transported supplies from Sacramento to Mother Lode mining camps. His mule corrals were located on "Corral Hill" where the Jackson Elementary School is now. Finally, Brown resumed practicing law which he had begun in Wisconsin before the Gold Rush.

The youngest Brown children attended Jackson's first elementary school held in the Methodist-Episcopal church that was built on "Corral Hill" in 1853 in classes taught by Mrs. Mary Trowbridge. A permanent 2-room brick school with a fireplace in each room replaced the church in 1858, serving as Jackson's elementary school for 30 years. In 1888, a 2-story brick building replaced the inadequate 2-room school, and in 1897, a second 2-story brick building was erected next to the original school that served students from Jackson and surrounding areas until 1948 when the old brick buildings were razed for the buildings that currently occupy that location across from the old Brown House.

On November 26, 1853, Brown was elected to serve as a town trustee with Leon Sompayrac, a jeweler; Thomas Jones, Ellis Evans, owner with Armstrong Askey of the Louisiana House (now The National Hotel), and William McKim, a county surveyor. At the Board of Trustee's first meeting, Sompayrac nominated his friend Brown to be its first President, whereupon Brown was unanimously elected. In 1856, the jeweler's young wife, Eliza Hart Sompayrac, died in childbirth. Because Sompayrac was Brown's friend and Eliza loved Brown's hill, she was laid to rest on the Brown property in a brick crypt with an iron door from her husband's jewelry shop. Leon Sompayrac left Jackson in 1857 and moved to Campres, France.

In 1859, the Brown's 2-story brick home was completed. Two ten-foot incense cedars that now tower over the house were transplanted from east of town to flank the walkway to the front door. Two utility units - one, a wash house near the cistern, and the other a combination woodshed and granary became the cottage when they were joined by a room in the center that was added as a study for James who was reading law under his father's tutelage. All water for domestic purposes was taken from the large, stone-lined cistern while a well drilled near the cook house on the south side of the home provided water for drinking and cooking. In the early 1880s, a large 1-story addition was built at the back of the house. When its second story was added, a new stairway taken from the old courthouse became the access to bedrooms on the upper floor.

A.C. Brown's political career began with his election to Jackson's Board of Trustees and continued when he was elected to the California legislature for three terms, serving in the 15th, 16th, and 18th sessions. *cont'd...* www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org

In 1876, he was elected as Amador County Judge and served one term after which he returned to his private law practice, continuing until he reached the age of 80. Philippia Williams, married Brown in 1837 and became the mother of their 9 children. Upon her death in 1896 at the age of 76, the local paper said of her, "the deceased was a woman who to the fullest extent embodied the true virtues of Christian charity and nobility." Armstead Calvin Brown Sr. died in 1902 at the age of 86, a revered founding father of Jackson.

George Brown and his wife, Mary Taylor, continued living in the Brown home after the death of A.C. Brown. George, 8th child of Armstead and Philippia, was born in Jackson in 1856 and served the County as Treasurer for many years. George and Mary enhanced the Brown Home by replacing the picket fence with a stately iron fence that originally surrounded the Oakland City Hall. They also added a kitchen and indoor plumbing to the home in 1932. Mary was an avid gardener and developed the grounds into a showplace with lovely flowering plants and shrubs. The couple's hospitality was known throughout the county.

Only three of the nine children survived their father: Mary Brown Askey, Margaret Brown Folger, George W. Brown and his wife Mary Taylor Brown. Upon the death of George W. Brown at the age of ninety in 1947, his nephew, Mr. Henry W. Folger along with Mr. John W. Williams, President of the Amador County Historical Society, began negotiating with the county to purchase the Brown house as a museum to collect artifacts and memorabilia representative of Amador County and its people. The historic Brown home was dedicated in January of 1949 as the Amador County Museum.

The Amador County Board of Supervisors appointed the Amador County Historical Society as custodians of the newly acquired property. Miss Mary Ellen McCaskey became the first curator with Miss Carrie Badaraco serving as assistant curator. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Espinosa were appointed custodians and lived in the garden cottage on the property. The historical society, founded in 1942, collected historic items and managed the property until the county took over the management in 1982. Manager Sean Crowder was followed by Cedric Clute from 1986-96. Succeeding him was Georgia Fox until 2008 when the museum was closed due to leaking of the composition roof. The county replaced it with tin. The historical society negotiated a new management agreement with the Amador County Board of Supervisors in 2012. The Museum reopened in 2013 after required seismic work to the brick building was completed.

A livery building that was erected in the early 1950s to house wagons and other large pieces of donated equipment was inadequate from the beginning, being too small and open on one side. The historical society now has plans for a much larger livery that will accommodate both large artifacts and visitors in a fully enclosed space. During the demolition and rebuilding process, those artifacts will be temporarily stored in the old Pole Barn that originally housed a large model train engine. That structure has now been enclosed. Later, it will be used for storage of rotating displays.

In the 1960s, Mr. Robert Post, son of Elbridge Post, one of the tailing wheel project engineers, began crafting a 1:12 scale model of the stamp mill, the wooden Kennedy headframe, and a tailing wheel, all of which were mechanized. Both the headframe and tailing wheel burned down in 1928. Only the stamp mill and mine office survived the fire. In 1972, the county purchased the models and had them installed in the red barn that was built for the models at the rear of the parking lot. The Museum's Mine Model tour is a demonstration of the deep rock mining process that produced most of the gold taken from the Mother Lode between the early 1860s and the early 1940s when the gold mines were shut down during WW II.

People of the county and many former residents, as well as collectors from other communities, have given generously to the museum over the years. Its eleven rooms are filled with beautiful artifacts that represent the people of Amador County and their activities. Today, visitors to the Amador County Museum arrive from all over California, other states, and foreign countries to sample the history of the Mother Lode and its mining past.

Amador County, which is situated in the heart of the Mother Lode, had the deepest and richest mines. The Kennedy, the Argonaut, and the Eureka, along with over 300 smaller mines in Amador County, produced over half of all the gold found on the vein and attracted miners from all over the world, but especially from Cornwall, Italy, and Serbia. Many descendants of those pioneering families still reside in Amador County and are justly proud of their heritage here.

Tragedy Spring by Frank Tortorich

The following is the last of four installments being published in *The Amadorian* from the article "Tragedy Spring and the Opening of the Gold Rush Trail" by Frank Tortorich. (Diary accounts are as originally written.)

Boiling Springs Springs Aug. 12 Truckee Rend Aug. 12-13 Cerson Peas Route Ro

THE JOURNEY TO SALT LAKE CONTINUES

Map of journey from Placerville to the joining of the California Trail¹

On July 21, the original group left Tragedy Spring to continue their journey to the Salt Lake Valley. The next few days found the going very difficult.

Bigler: Friday 21st. haveing found all our stock except 1 or 2 mules we hooked on and moved a bout 4 miles and campt at what we called Rock Creek...² cont'd...

¹ Ricketts, *Mormon Battalion*, 206.

² That name was used by most journalists. Today it is the private ranch of the Allen family. <u>www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org</u>

Sat. 22nd. Camp laid by while myself and 15 others worked a road **to the top of the mountain** (West Pass) ... I past over snow more than 2 feet deep and saw banks ten and perhaps 50 ft. deep, this day I gathered flowers with one hand and snow with the other...

Mo. 24th. Moved bout 6 mi. and campt just over the Sumit. ...³

Smith: Tuesday July the 25th. Sunday some of the Boys went ahead to fix the road, and Monday we started, and travailed about Seven miles, haveing a very bad road, for the wagons; and Brother Rogers wagon tip[p]ed over twice; and several wagons got broke, and today they [are] fixing them, and getting the remainder of them to camp.⁴

Bigler: Wed. 26^{th} Moved to the foot of the mountain and campt near a lake, this we call lake valley ...⁵ Thurs 27^{th} made some Road, 20 indians came into camp all armed with Bows & arrows but laid them by while in camp. ...⁶

It would be interesting to know if these Indians knew about the Tragedy Spring killings.

Fr. 28^{th} , Moved 3 m. and made an early encampment at the head of the American for k^7 near or at the Summit (Carson Pass) of the great Sierra Nevada ...

Sat. 29^{th} ... moved across about one mile & half and campt at the head of what we calld hope valley [as we began to have hope] 8 ...

Sunday 30th Worked & made a road for about 2 miles and moved camp about 8 and encamped on what we calld pass Creek at the head of a Kanyon.⁹ Here we expect to lay by for several days in order to work a road through the Cannon about 4 miles and very bad.¹⁰

Nearly every gold rush journal remarked on this canyon's difficulty.

Mary Jane Caples stated it well in her 1911 reminiscences of her 1849 journey:

After about 30 miles up the river we came to Carson Canyon, one of the worst pieces of road on the whole route; It took all day, with the hardest work men and animals ever did, to make five miles. No one thought of riding. I carried my baby and walked all the way. The next day we had a beautiful drive through Hope Valley. 11

Mormon Battalion Journalist Zadok Knapp Judd, Sr. "Recollections." Given at age 77: Spring 1848 ... cont'd...

11

Mary Jane Walker Caples, *Overland Journey to California*. The California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA, requested that Caples write her reminiscences and they house the document. **HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO NOTE THIS.**

³ This is West Pass. At 9,640 feet it is the highest pass over which wagons traveled during the early years of the gold rush. Interesting to note there are two California state plaques placed on SR 88 stating the West Pass elevations of 9,460 feet and 9,640 feet, one cast after the other.

⁴ David L. Bigler, ed., 132.

⁵ This is Caples Lake.

⁶ These would be Washoe Indians.

⁷ Bigler had the drainage correct as Caples Lake drains into the Silver Fork of the American River.

⁸ Called Hope Valley today.

⁹ This is the West Fork of The Carson River and they are camped in Hope Valley at the head of Woodfords Canyon.

¹⁰ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 154.

... We had no hammers nor drill with which we could do anything with the stone. It seemed almost an impossibility to go farther. Finally some one suggested that we build a fire on the rocks, and as there was plenty of dry logs and brush near, there was soon a good fire blazing on each rock that lay in our way. When the fire had died down and cooled off a little, we found that as far as the heat had penetrated, the rocks were all broken in small pieces, which were soon removed with pick and shovel and another fire built with the same result. After building three or four fires, we found that the rocks were not much in our way, and we soon had a good wagon road right over them, ...¹²

It took nearly a week for them to make a crude wagon trail down the canyon.

Bigler: Thurs (August) 3d Road workeing in the afternoon fell a little rain & Snow We were overtaken to day by 13 of our boys with pack animals they had left the mines 5 days ago. We finished our Road. Fr. 4th Moved through the Kanyon all safe. 4 indians came into Camp.

Sun. 6th Continued down Carson River past a hot spring¹³ campt in the bend of the River here Mr. Pratt killed a Rattlesnake which gave the name rattlesnake camp -- at night we could see as it were a hundred fires in the Cal. Mountains made no doubt by indians some think it is a signel to other indians of distress others say it is for peace and others say it is for war Mr Weaver one of Col. Cooks guides said a smoke raised on the mountains was a signal for peace and a token for help and a smoke raised in the valley was a sign for war. ¹⁴...

The group continued down the Carson River to a place where they turned to the northwest (see the trail map on page 4) until they reached the Truckee River near today's Fernley, Nevada.

It remains a mystery of how they knew to take this detour to reach the main California Trail. Then they turned east to face the forty-mile desert and the 650-mile journey to the Salt Lake Valley.

Bigler: Sat. 12th Left the Carson River traveled rather a N.W. course 25 miles when we struck the old trucky road on the east side of Truckey River Here our packers left us and went ahead¹⁵

BIRTH OF THE GOLD RUSH TRAIL

Little did these members of the battalion know that their new wagon trail would become the most heavily used route to the gold fields during the great gold rush migration. The following journal readings help explain how this all came about. As you read Bigler's August 12 journal entry above, their group had turned east to merge with the Truckee River Route. California's first wagon trail over the Sierra Nevada opened in 1844; after 1847 it became known as the Donner Trail.

Bigler: Mo. 14th after traveling about 8 miles over a sandy road we than had a smooth road and encampted at the boiling springs makeing about 25 m. ¹⁶ Here we made our tea and Coffee without fire to heat the water. A little dog walked up so near to one of theese springs as to loose his balance and fell in and was instantly scalled to death and boilt to peaces ... cont'd...

¹² USFS Report, 4.

¹³ This is today's David Walley's Hot Springs Resort and Spa, Genoa, NV.

¹⁴ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler,", 155.

¹⁵ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler,", 156.

¹⁶ This is located off I-80 at the Nightingale exit. Today it is the site of a large onion drying plant. www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org

Tues. 15^{th} . At 11 last night we rolled out for water the moon shone bright and a good road and at 6 this morning we arrived at the sink of the Humboldt and campt the water here was not very good Cattle did not like it towards evening 18 emigrant wagons rolled in and campt by us ... 17

They had just crossed the infamous "Forty-Mile Desert" on the Truckee River Route. The Humboldt Sink¹⁸ is about 25 miles west of Lovelock, Nevada.

Smith: Wednesday August the 16th. In the after noon yesterday, some sixteen¹⁹ wagons came in, on their way to California, from the States, and they got a waybill of us--calculating to take our trail over the mountains.²⁰

Many historians consider this to be the party lead by mountain man James Clyman and would be the first wagon train to take the Carson River Route traveling west.²¹

When the Mormon men showed the Clyman group their gold,

... an old man traveling with Clyman, Lambert McCombs, jumped to his feet, threw his hat in the air, and shouted, "Glory Hallelujah, thank God, I shall die a rich man yet. ²²

Bigler: Wed. 16th ... made 20 miles, road good at this camp that water is a little better and runs a little the stock looks bad not haveing much grass and water sence leaveing trucky. To day we met 25 wagons, emegrants for Cal.²³

This most likely was the party of Pierre Barlow Cornwall who would be the second wagon train to take the Carson River Route traveling west.²⁴

The east-bound party continued traveling up the well-beaten trail along the Humboldt River for another ten days when they met another west bound wagon train.

Bigler: Sat. 26th. We met ten wagons of emegrants.²⁵

This was the Peter Lassen wagon party. However, the party did not take either the Carson River Route or Truckee River Route, but rather followed the Applegate Route opened in 1846.²⁶ This route left the main California Trail heading northwest to cross the Black Rock Desert and beyond.²⁷

Bigler: Sunday 27th. Laid by at 3 p.m. the camp come together at Addison Pratts tent and held a prayer meeting, just as the meeting was over, Captain S. Hensley and Company of ten on packs came up we were informed by Capt. H. that it was not more than 380 miles to Salt Lake by takeing a certain route that he had found and had just come he gave us a way bill saying the route was a good one and easy to be found saveing at least 8 or ten days travel as it was our intention to go by way of fort hall ... and on the 30th we met cont'd...

¹⁷ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler,", 156.

¹⁸ Humboldt Sink refers to the area where the west end of Humboldt River disappears into the Nevada desert.

¹⁹ Notice Bigler tells a similar story but stated eighteen wagons came in. 121.

²⁰ David L. Bigler, ed., 137.

²¹ Thomas Frederick Howard, Sierra Crossing: First Roads to California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 44.

²² Ricketts, Mormon Battalion. 215.

²³ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler,", 156.

²⁴ Bruce Cornwell, his son, Life Sketch of Pierre Barlow Cornwall (San Francisco: A.M. Robertson, 1906), 26.

²⁵ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler,", 157

²⁶ Further reading: Ken Johnston, *Legendary Truths: Peter Lassen & His Gold Rush Trail in Fact & Fable* (Greybull, WY: Pronghorn Press, 2012).

²⁷ Howard, 72.

Captain Chiles) and Company of 48 wagons, of emegrants he gave us a way bill purporting to give a still nearer route than that of Hensley's. ... ²⁸

Joseph B. Chiles first came to California in 1841. Proceeding west, he guided his party to the Humboldt Sink. However, instead of following the Mormon route along the Truckee River Route, he struck boldly across the country directly from the Humboldt Sink to the Carson River.²⁹ This line of travel formed the base of the triangle instead of following the two sides as the Mormons had done. By this daring move he successfully established "the arduous route across the forty-mile desert."

This cut-off later became the established route "and over it in the next few years, passed thousands of travelers... Following along the west fork of the Carson River, toward the Sierra, and using the map supplied him by the Mormons, Chiles directed his company over the Carson Pass." ...³⁰

Bigler: September 27. Laid By. The day was spent mending wagons... Washing clothes, trimming hair, shaving up, and dressing seemed to be the order of the day. Everybody in camp busy and in the finest of spirits, and [it was] said to be only about twenty-five or thirty miles to Great Salt Lake City. ...

September 29. We arrived at the Great Salt Lake settlement where a city was already laid out and named "Great Salt Lake City." Here I found my sister Emeline and husband John W. Hess, at whose house I made my home.

CONCLUSION

It did not take long for the word to spread that the new Carson River Route of the California Trail was a better and shorter route to the gold fields than the older Truckee River Route. The Carson River Route not only went directly to the gold fields, but it avoided the 27 river crossings in the Truckee River Canyon. The Mormon route had only three river crossings in Carson River Canyon.

In 1849 it is estimated that some 25,000 to 40,000 gold rushers came to seek their fortune. Most used the Carson River Route. In 1850 it is estimated that between 55,000 and 75,000 gold seekers came to California, and again most used the Carson River Route. The cholera epidemic of 1849-1850 suppressed the 1851 migration,³¹ with an estimate of only 10,000 coming to California. But 1852 was another year of heavy migration with an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 pioneers coming to California.³²

Their goal, from the day they were mustered into the US Army at Mount Pisgah, lowa, on July 16, 1846, and through a more than two-year separation, was to reunite with family and friends to settle their new church home.

Their intention was not to clear a trail for wagons for all those who might come later, but simply to get themselves, their 17 wagons, two brass cannons, and 300 hundred head of animals to the Salt Lake Valley. These discharged members of the Mormon Battalion, following an Indian footpath, created a new wagon trail through heroic efforts, hard work, and suffering. It was these efforts that their wagon trail would forever be known as the Carson River Route of the California Trail, the "Gold Rush Trail." 33

www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org.

²⁸ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler,", 157.

²⁹ They met the Carson River at Ragtown, 7 miles west of Fallon, NV.

³⁰ Helen S. Giffen, *TRAIL-BLAZING PIONEEER: Colonel Joseph Ballinger Chiles.* (San Francisco: John Howell-Books, 1969), 72-73

³¹ The outbreak that struck Nashville, TN, in 1849–1850 took the life of former U.S. President James K. Polk.

³² Mattes, Merrill J. *Platte River Road Narratives* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 2-3

³³ Tortorich, *Gold Rush Trail*.

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Welcome to new members,

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Our list of donors is growing, making the new Livery Building Project possible

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Your generous donation will help build the New Livery Building which will replicate the California-style of rural agricultural buildings. Learn more at www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org

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Board Meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 3:00 p.m. 225 Church St., Jackson (Amador County Museum)

Members and friends are invited to attend.

ACHS Mission Statement

The society was formed for the purpose of identifying and preserving items of historical interest of Amador County for its residents and the general public and to educate and increase public awareness while at the same time enlisting public support for historical preservation in Amador County.

The Amador County Historical Society has also partnered with the Recreational Railroad Coalition Historical Society in owning and operating the Amador Central Railroad, a great part of the county's history.

Support

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The Amadorian Editors: Cathy McGowan, Hazel & Jeffrey Powell

www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org

About the Amador County Historical Society

The Amador County Historical Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the research and preservation of Amador County heritage and history.

The organization brings together people from diverse backgrounds to work towards these goals. We invite all interested persons to attend our monthly meetings and encourage your suggestions and active participation in Society events and endeavors.

We also welcome guest articles for our newsletter. Unfortunately, due to limited space we can accept only those pertaining to local history. If you have any questions regarding ACHS please contact the office at (209) 257-1485.

If you would like to become a member of the Society, please fill in the membership form below and mail along with the appropriate dues to the Amador County Historical Society, P.O. Box 761, Jackson, CA 95642-0761

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The Amadorian A Publication of the Amador County Historical Society P.O. Box 761 Jackson, CA 95642

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