

## Lane City

by June Shaputis 2000

Lane City is located three miles northwest of Ely, Nevada and sits on the east side of the road as the motorist begins traveling up Robinson Canyon on a stretch of highway titled the Loneliest Highway in America. (Hwy. 50). This site was the original settlement for the Ely area and was known as Mineral City (1869-1876). The mining district it lies in is called the Robinson District.

It is said that prospectors in the canyon were shown a silver bearing rock by an Indian in November 1867. In March 1868, the Robinson Mining District formed and the miners named their new camp Mineral City. Mineral City became the first supply camp in the area within a radius of 50 miles or more and served the Lake Mining District located to the southeast, the Hunter Mining District north of Hercules Gap and the Tamberlane (Tamerlane) District to the east. Other camps accessed supplies and the camp provided travelers with lodging, food and other items. Freight arrived by wagons pulled by mules and ox teams. The leading freighters of the early days were Moffatt and Gosset known as "Moff and Goss."

The townsite site boasted a furnace and ten-stamp mill, mercantile stores, a post office, express office, six saloons, hotels, restaurants, livery stables, four boarding houses, a blacksmith shop and a population of 600 people in 1872. This number had dropped to around 300 people in the fall of 1874 because of low-grade ores.

Some of the early pioneers of Mineral City in 1874 were:

Henry and Fred Hilp who operated the largest mercantile business named Hilp Brothers. Henry Hilp was the postmaster for Mineral City. Mr. Swartz operated a men's furnishing store. Sam Roach and Dick Fossett ran the livery stable and a blacksmithing and wagon-making business.

Sam Jones ran one of the saloons. Other saloon keepers were W. R. Bassett, Billy Moss and Jack Irvine. Mose Storer operated a combination saloon and gambling house that was said to have kept a bank of fifty thousand dollars in gold twenties to accommodate the traveler who wished to partake of the various gambling games. Faro was one of the most popular games. Frank Bacon was the dealer and George Tyler acted as a lookout.

John Bonnifield was the first to placer mine in the Robinson District. He used the dry-wash method on the old tailing dumps between serving as the night watchman and constable at Mineral City.

Judge Walsh operated the small smelter and Elijah mine just below Mineral City on the north side of the road that had been leased from the Canton Mining Company. The Canton Mining Company obtained eighteen mining claims in 1872 in the Robinson Canyon area. By 1877 the Aultman Group built an unsuccessful smelter on the south side of the hill and

abandoned production. They then leased the mine to W. G. Lyons, W. N. McGill, J. P. McOmie and A. J. Underhill who built the ten-stamp mill that crushed the ore.

The Company's main stockholders were Cornelius Aultman, George A. Sexton (the father of the wife of US President McKinley) and William McKinley who later became president of the United States. McKinley invested eighty thousand dollars into the Robinson Mining District, using his interest in twenty-nine patented claims in and around Robinson Canyon as collateral. Mr. Sexton became full owner of the Canton Mining Company and on his death, the Robinson Mining Districts claims were bequeathed to his children who included Mrs. McKinley, Mrs. Barber, George D. Sexton, and others. These mines were then known as the Aultman group and were to later become very prominent when vast areas of low grade copper was discovered.

George Knox contracted to mine the ore in the Elijah mine, the oldest mine in the district. Ben Snell was the supervisor at the smelter and Snell's stepson Joe Peroult and Charlie Beckwith were the engineers. Ben Miller, Billy Boyce, Tom Hannigan, and Abe Travis mined twenty tons of ore a day. This ore averaged eighty ounces in silver and from sixty to seventy percent lead. Tom Sillyman (Silliman) hauled the ore to the smelter.

The popular and enterprising Mrs. Fanny Yates built and operated the earliest and finest hotel and restaurant in Mineral City. She had previously built the first similar establishments in both [Ward](#) and [Taylor](#) before each camp in succession succumbed to the decline of mining. Mrs. Yates was a respected business woman as well as a society leader well known throughout the area. Her two daughters, Mollie Fouts and Julia Fouts were educated at the Mills Seminary in California and accomplished musicians. Each married influential men of the area, W. N. McGill and Robert Briggs.

Matt Gleason also operated a hotel in Mineral City. "Uncle" John Ragsdale hauled freight between Cobre "Toano" and Mineral City and mined in the area. "Doc" Bell and John Condon hauled stage coach passengers tri-weekly between Cherry Creek, Nevada and Hamilton, Nevada.

A. R. "Buckskin" Watson, Mr. Cox, County Commissioner Sam Mosier, A. T. Lowery, Jack Shallenberger, William Crary (discovered the Lake District), Joseph "Tamerlane Joe" Thompson (locator of Tamerlane townsite), Dr. Brooks (established town of Aurum aka 'Silver Canon'), Jakie (sic) Henderson, and Harry Featherstone (locator of the Keystone Mine), Robert "One-eyed Bob" Hughes, Allen Forest, Lou Carpenter, Alex McKenzie and Dave Weaver were all popular citizens of the immediate area and surrounding Mineral City.

Declining mining production caused the Mineral City post office to close in 1876.

In 1877, Thomas Rockhill located the Chainman Gold Mine, then he

transferred title to W. G. Lyons, W. N. McGill, J. P. McOmie and A. J. Underhill who invested money into it but it was not successful so they disposed of it to Charles D. Lane in 1897. Lane's son Thomas T. managed the mine while his father went to Alaska where he became a millionaire. Mineral City was renamed to Lane City for Charles D. Lane who purchased the Chainman Mine and Mill in 1896/97. The small valley that lies in Robinson Canyon was referred to as Lane Valley. C. D. Lane invested over \$168,000 to build a water ditch, power plant and a 100-ton cyanide mill. The Chainman's power plant supplied Ely its first electricity to power electric lights in 1898. For twenty dollars a month, the Chainman Company furnished ten thirty-two-candle-power lights and Ely was finally illuminated.

The mill started up in March 1902. Not enough paying ore was recovered from the undeveloped claims Lane had purchased. What ore was mined could not be processed by the cyanidization method. Around five years later, Mr. Lane, due to the son's long-term mismanagement, returned the property to the original owners who were represented by William N. McGill.

In the 1950's, Lane City had several stone, frame and log buildings, a primitive stone structure built as an ox-freight station and an outdoor oven still used by some families living in the area who worked at the nearby mines.

In 2000, the 1900 era structures are deteriorating and collapsing into the sagebrush. Not one original building remains.

Sources:

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White Pine Lang Syne by Effie Oxborrow Read.

Nevada Ghost Towns & Mining Camps by Stanley Paher