

WHERE WAS JAMESON'S STATION LOCATED?

A REPORT ON THE LATEST RESEARCH AND REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE

By Don Buck

THE LONG HELD VIEW

There is enough documentary evidence now available to question the long held view that Jameson's trading post or station was located about a half-mile east of the present Reno-Sparks wastewater treatment facility at the entrance to the Truckee River Canyon. At this location there are some stone ruins where the Nevada Emigrant Trail Marker Committee (NETMC) placed a steel-rail marker (TRR-11) some time in the late 1960's or early 1970's. The descriptive brass plate on the top cross bar of this marker reads: "Jameson's Station. Emigrant Trading Post. Site of first Settlement in Truckee Meadows - 1852."

The well-known Sparks historian, Walt Mulcahy announced in an article written for the Nevada State Journal, March 25, 1962, that he had located the ruins of Jameson's station, stating: "It was finally decided that point No. 2 on the map [in the newspaper article] was the location of the first permanent settlement in the valley, that made by the Mormon Jameson in 1852. The most conclusive proof of this is the fact that history tells us that his trading post was located on the river. The ruins found at point No. 2 are on the river and command a large acreage of rich fields. This would have been an ideal spot for station construction as it was located almost in the mouth of the canyon, directly upon the old trail, and allowed first contact with the emigrants, eager to buy provisions and trade worn and weary cattle for fresh and strong stock."

Later in the NETMC's Overland Emigrant Trail to California: A Guide to Trail Markers Placed in Western Nevada and the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California (first published in 1975), Mulcahy wrote that Jameson's station "was the first permanent settlement in the Truckee Meadows (Reno) built in 1852. The marker lies in a fenced enclosure containing the stone ruins of the station, close to the Truckee River and 0.5 mile east of the Reno-Sparks Sewage Plant."

Note the apparent reasoning that led Mulcahy to believe the stone ruins a half-mile east of the present wastewater treatment facility must have been Jameson's trading post. Earlier historical references (quoted below) stated that a Mormon from Carson Valley, by the name of Jameson or Jamison, established in 1852 a station on the Truckee River in the meadows to trade with emigrants. Mulcahy found some stone ruins at the mouth of the Truckee River Canyon on the south side of the river and assumed these ruins were the remains of Jameson's station.

Furthermore, as trail historian Don Wiggins of Reno has pointed out, in the same Nevada State Journal article, Mulcahy had determined that the meadows extending west of

Steamboat Creek and south of Truckee River were too marshy for emigrant travel and camping. This forced them, according to Mulcahy, to detour south through present Hidden Valley and then turn northwesterly along the base of Huffaker Hills to skirt this supposed marshy meadow area to the north. Because no trading post could have been situated in such a marshy environment, Mulcahy seems to have concluded that those stone ruins at the head of the river canyon would have been the only place in the meadows where Jameson could have located his trading post.

However, Wiggins has shown that this supposed swampy area west of Steamboat Creek and south of the river was the actual way emigrants traveled in crossing the meadows and the place where they camped. By 1852 the center of these meadows next to the river had become the crossing for the beginning of the Beckwourth Trail and access to the new Henness Pass Trail. The proof for this lies in the General Land Office Plat for 1861-62 (Township 19 North & Range 20 East) where the surveyor clearly delineated the extent of the famous Truckee Meadows with trails running through these meadows both westerly and northerly. Interestingly, the surveyor showed no trail or road through Hidden Valley, but that will become the subject of another trail report.

SOME NEW EVIDENCE

Today, much evidence has accumulated that provides clues to the location of Jameson Station or trading post. The earliest reference to a Jameson Station was in the History of Nevada, published in 1881 by Thomas H. Thompson and Albert A. West of San Francisco. The field research was conducted by Myron Angel who was employed by Thompson and West. On page 623 is written: "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." There is no source cited so presumably Angel obtained this information locally and orally. The next reference to Jameson Station came in The History of Nevada, edited by Sam P. Davis, and published in 1913. In volume 1, there is an article by Robert Lewers, "Early Emigrants." On page 227, Lewers wrote: "On the Truckee Meadows, a Mormon named Jameson established a trading station, but the exact location of this place seems to be unknown." Then, in the Nevada State Historical Society Papers, volume 4 (1923-24), published by the Nevada State Historical Society in Reno, is an article by Annie E. Prouty, "Development of Reno in Relation to its Topography" (her Master's Degree thesis). On page 60, Prouty wrote: "For several years the only settlement on the Truckee was that of Jameson. He was a Mormon who came from Carson Valley in 1852 and established a station where Glendale is now."

In tracking down this information, Dave Hollecker of Reno came across another reference to the location of Jameson Station, again in the Nevada State Historical Society Papers, this time in volume 5, 1925-26. In an article by F. B. Kingsbury, "Pioneer Days in Sparks and Vicinity; Early Settlers and Points of Interest," Kingsbury wrote on page 291: "According to one man's story (name not given), when he passed through here in the

year 1854 there was only one person living in this valley and that was a trader who dwelt in a tent some distance northward from what later became Glendale." (In a footnote, the editor of the Papers suggested this trader may have been "Jamison.") Kingsbury pointed out that the location of the 1854 trading post was near the later "Stone and Gates" trading post and crossing of the Truckee River in the Truckee Meadows.

These four references to a Jameson's trading post (and note there are two spellings of Jameson's name) indicate it was located in the Truckee Meadows, next to the river. At least one of the three sources points to the location at future Glendale where present East McCarran Blvd crosses to the north side of the river (at the beginning of the Beckwourth Trail). Another of these sources indicates that the trading post in the Truckee Meadows at later Glendale was a tent, not a stone structure.

MORE EVIDENCE

There is good reason why someone from Carson Valley would establish a trading post in 1852 near the river in Truckee Meadows. After the big rush for gold in 1849-50, emigrant traffic over the Truckee Trail into California diminished considerably due to the arduous character of this trail compared to the easier Carson Trail to the south. By 1852, however, two new and much easier trails had been opened to northern California, the Henness Pass Trail and the Beckwourth Trail. These two new trails, especially the Beckwourth Trail, attracted a new burst of emigrants on the Truckee Trail to the meadows at future Reno-Sparks. With new trading opportunities now existing, it makes historical sense that someone would establish a trading post or station on the Truckee River in the vicinity of the lush meadows where the Beckwourth Trail crossed the river and headed north.

In his *Tough Little Town on the Truckee*, published in 1983, historian John M. Townley provided more information about the activities of "H. H. Jamison." "Jamison ... had been the Carson Valley agent for George Chorpenning, Jr., U.S. Mail contractor between Utah and Sacramento. How long he had been at Mormon Station is unknown, but long enough to be included in a slate of officers elected by a Carson Valley squatter government formed in November, 1851. Thought to be a Mormon, Jamison might have come to Carson Valley in 1851 with John Reese. In 1850, he was included in Utah's census as a resident of Weber County and appears again in 1851. ... Another development in 1852 was use of the Meadows by Chorpenning's Utah-to-California mail riders. In winter, they adopted Beckwourth's route as a crossing. Jamison's move to the Truckee might have been tied to his mail duties, combining trade with a strong-point for riders."

It would have been very unlikely, however, that a trader in the Truckee Meadows would have built a permanent stone structure as early as 1852. Typically, emigrant trading posts were seasonal affairs consisting of temporary structures made up of wagons and tents, like those at "Ragtown" at the end of the Forty Mile Desert near present day Fallon,

Nevada. Only when a trading post became a year-around establishment, like Mormon Station at present Genoa in Carson Valley, would there be a permanent structure.

Underscoring this, as Don Wiggins pointed out, was East S. Owen's observation about the lack of permanent structures on the overland trail in 1852. After traveling through Truckee River Canyon and reaching Jim Beckwourth's ranch and trading post west of Beckwourth Pass on Aug. 25, 1852, Owen wrote that it was "the first house except the government buildings at fort Laramie, that I have seen in traveling the last two thousand miles."

According to Kingsbury, referred to in part 1 of this article, the first permanent structure in the Reno-Sparks area was the hotel/trading establishment built by John Stone and Charles Gates in 1857. It was located on the north side of the river at the Beckwourth Trail crossing (near present East McCarran Blvd). As Glendale developed, Stanford Way was laid on top of the old Beckwourth Trail for about a mile-and-a-half. The development of Sparks in the early 1900's altered Stanford Way so that now only two-block near the river are over the original Beckwourth Trail alignment.

WHAT THEY ARE NOT

So far the evidence for a trading post or station in 1852 points to a location about 2 miles west of Steamboat Creek in historic Glendale. But let's look more closely at the purported site of a trading post at the entrance of Truckee River Canyon on the south side of the river where the stone remains of some kind of structure exist (about a half-mile east of the present water reclamation facility).

If a trading post existed at this location in 1852, surely an emigrant who kept a daily diary would have recorded this fact. Emigrant diarists routinely commented on trading posts when they came to or by them. By 1852 emigrants coming off the Forty Mile Desert crossing to the Truckee River (near present Wadsworth) commented on encountering trading posts at this location. And in 1852 the emigrant trail followed along the south side of the Truckee River at the mouth of the canyon where those stone remains of a structure are still visible and are marked with the NETMC steel-rail marker.

Of the 35 emigrant diaries consulted so far that describe emigrant travel through the Truckee River Canyon (from Wadsworth to Sparks) during the years 1852, 53, 54, 55, & 57, not one mentions passing or stopping at a trading post at the mouth of the canyon where supposedly Jameson's station was located. With the wagon trail going right past the front of those stone ruins, surely some emigrants would have recorded in their diaries the existence of a station had it been there.

Recently, Don Wiggins uncovered an emigrant account which is the earliest reference he's found to a trading post in the Truckee Meadows. It's from the book, *Pen Pictures of Early Western Days* by Virginia Wilcox Ivins, an 1853 emigrant. She wrote

After passing the shingly mountains September eighth we came down into a beautiful valley with fine grass and plenty of water, called Truckee meadow. Carl had taken a lot of provisions out of the wagon to sun, and as there was a trading post near by, the proprietor was looking around to see what the emigrants would sell or leave, he immediately wanted some of our supplies.

The next year, William Woodham reported seeing "the flag of a trading post" on July 14, 1854. It was located on the north side of the river at the Beckwourth Trail crossing (in the vicinity of East McCarran Blvd and historic Glendale). Though speculative, could this trading post and the one mentioned by Ivins have been Jameson's? Recall this statement written in the Nevada State Historical Society Papers for 1924: "For several years the only settlement on the Truckee was that of Jameson. He was a Mormon who came from Carson Valley in 1852 and established a station where Glendale is now." Then in October 4, 1857, Arthur M. Menefee described crossing Steamboat Slough and "reaching the Valley, where we took up camp on the river bank near a shanty of the traders." The trader shanty he mentioned was not at the mouth of the river canyon but in Truckee Meadows near the river, most likely at the Beckwourth Trail crossing.

WHAT COULD THEY BE?

Let's turn to a less speculative question. If the stone ruins a half-mile east of the water reclamation facility could not be the remains of Jameson's station, what could they be? Two old maps, uncovered by Wiggins, may give us a clue to the origins of those ruins. The first is the GLO plat of 1861-62 (T19N, R20E), already referred to, which shows a structure located on the south side of the Truckee River very close to those stone ruins (in the NE quarter of the NE quarter of Sec. 14) and a little to the west of the current Washoe/Story County north-south boundary line. The surveyor indicated on the plat that this structure belonged to "J. Guery."

The second old map, dating from late 1862 to early 1863, comes from the Washoe County Recorders Office ("Liens & Misc.," Books A & B). It is a "Plat of Survey" showing two structures at the same location as the one belonging to "J. Guery." The accompanying survey notes indicate these structures and adjacent property belonged to "John Georges." The spellings of these two names are close enough to suggest that both the GLO Plat and the County Plat refer to the same owner.

Because these structures were presumably the ones the owner lived in, Wiggins concluded there is a good probability they were built out of the local rock which is abundant in this locality. Therefore, the existing stone remains of a structure attributed to Jameson and his trading post more likely were the remains of a stone structure built by "John Guery/Georges." At least there is more evidence supporting a "Guery/Georges" ownership than a "Jamison/Jameson" ownership.

Randall Gray, the manager of the water reclamation facility at the entrance to the Truckee River Canyon, drew my attention to a recent publication by Lawrence K. Hersh, The

Central Pacific Railroad across Nevada, 1868 & 1997. In this book, Hersh reproduced old photos taken in 1868 of railroad construction, one of which shows the railroad at the entrance of the Truckee River Canyon. If you look closely at the background of this photo (No. 290) as Gray did, you can see a cluster of at least two buildings on the south side of the river in about the same location as today's stone ruins. Possibly, the structures in the railroad photo, the references to structures owned by Guerey/Georges, and those stone ruins are all historically related.

There is enough evidence now available to seriously challenge the long held belief that the remains of Jameson's Station are those stone ruins at the entrance to the Truckee River Canyon identified by Walt Mulcahy four decades ago. Nonetheless, this evidence doesn't diminish the historical significance of those ruins. They could be the remains of a homestead dating from the early 1860s. If an archaeological search could verify this, it would be an important discovery of one of the oldest remains of a settlement in the Reno-Sparks area.