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Barton Tells Of Early Mineral King Trails, Roads

by Joe Doctor

The following is the second part of a letter, the first part of which was printed in this column last week, from Orlando Barton, one of the pioneers of the Mineral King silver boom and member of an early-day Three Rivers family, written to Judge William Wallace dated August, 1905. Barton was then at Devil's Den, where he had oil prospecting interests. His travels in the hot west side of the valley were usually by bicycle. He had many friends among the Yokuts Indians around Three Rivers. The following part of the letter deals with early access trails and road sot Mineral King:

John Meadows and his men followed the snow as it melted in 1874, making the trail as they advanced. The first house up was the log cabin built by Enos Barton and William Thayer. Before the trail was finished, Meadows founded Silver City down in the redwood belt. In the 60s the Works had made a trail up to the Milk Ranch and the Oriole Lake. By using the trail, Lovelace got his cattle into Mineral King in the summer of 1873. He was there when the Crabtrees discovered the White Chief. His son, Jo, still lives in Visalia.

He built the fence across the flat at the Bartons' cabin and at first disputed the right of the miners to come in. The first blast the Crabtrees fired on the White Chief frightened him badly. I went in on the Works' trail in November, 1873, in company with Flem Work, Dave Findley, Archibald Morgan, W.F. Vivian and Parson Vivian. We met Stephen Barton and William Thayer as they were coming out at the Milk Ranch. We were the first party to go in over the Works trail. The season was late and everybody was afraid of getting snowed in.

After the place was discovered, we discovered that the Wutchumna Indians knew all about Mineral King and could describe it in detail. Some of them were born there.

The Works, although always hunting for the Seven Cabins, did not believe them to be located in the Mineral King country. They thought the cabins were north of the main river.

The New England company and its baby, the road company, owed us miners \$7,000 when they went into insolvency. They owed me \$193 of which I never received one cent. Marcus LaValle got all his money as he went by taking money out as it was sawed. The first good houses were built after Enos and I took charge of the sawmill.

In the summer of 1874 there were 500 men in the camp. The Bequettes, Pascal and I think Charlie, with D.M. Adams were the first to get over Farewell Gap. They discovered the Bullion [mine]. C.G. Lamberson and I next went over the Gap. We discovered a large body of arsenical iron and called it the Argent. John Meadows was the most energetic prospector. He located 60 claims. Jim Mankins discovered more good ore than anybody. We all looked on Harry

Parole as the oracle of wisdom. We learned of leads, spurs, faults and ore chutes and could talk wisely about silver mining. None of us knew anything about it. Except perhaps for Harry Parole, there was not a man in the camp who knew how to prospect for free gold in quartz. On second thought, I guess Jim Mankins could. There was a mass meeting in May, I think, and the majority voted to call the town Beulah (the border of Heaven.) This made J.P. Ford mad so he called his end of town "Mineral King Proper." When . . . [text unreadable] . . . was heard no more.

The first store was started by Wiley Watson and I think George Thurman. This store was located about one mile south of the present hotel. Miners continually rolled rocks down the hillside and through town. A law was passed requiring the miners to keep the rocks on their own land. This nuisance and snow slides finally caused the abandonment of the flat south of Monarch Creek as a place of business.

There were numerous saloons, one of them away south where the trail stars over Farewell Gap. In all about 2,000 claims were filed that summer and I will think J.P. Ford, the recorder who was allowed to charge \$5 for recording a claim was flat broke the next year. Marcus LaValle worked at getting out ore on the White Chief. He was principal owner of the Lady Emma in Monarch Canyon. There was a precinct at Mineral King and we voted for Tilden at Belden's house. I scratched for the first time, voting for Pacheco instead of Wiggington.

In the winter of 1877-78 the large house of the New England company was knocked down by a snow slide, burying Mrs. Trauger and the men who were at work on the inside. No one was killed. They could not keep a house at the tunnel. The house there was constantly swept away by avalanches. Harry Trauger worked continually in the tunnel. In the summer of 1877 the first post office was established. The first mail carrier was a little one-eyed Cornishman. He carried the mail on foot, making the entire trip to Visalia and back by "Shank's horses."

I am tired and suffering from brain fog now. When I try to recall through the long vistas of memory the scenes of Mineral King 30 years ago, there rises in my breast vague longing and half sleeping visions of old happiness, of times long dead. There seem to come to me voices from secret friends I shall never see again. I am recalled to the present by looking out of my window at the bare white hills and desolate landscape of the oil belt.

Really my most vivid recollection of Mineral King is of the girls I met there, of our dances in the kitchen of the New England company, of our picnic to Kern River and generally to the lift of the Lotus Eaters that we lead there.

I will put this manuscript in an envelope and send it off before I get in a sloppy condition and spoil the paper with an overflow of tears. Perhaps I will write more soon.

O.D. Barton