

# RECOLLECTIONS



By C. CLARKE KEELY

SKI CABIN

RECOLLECTIONS

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Ann and Jean have urged me over a long period of time to try to put down my recollections about places and happenings in which the family members have had a common interest.

So, it is now January 12, 1985, and I plan to tell some tales and stories of Mammoth, the Department of Water and Power, the Illinois and Iowa farms, and other places and things that come to mind. Let's start with Mammoth Lakes.

MAMMOTH

I was never sure of when it was that I first went to Mammoth, but fortunately I recently found an old diary, one of those line-a-day diaries, five years on a page, where there's not much room to write; but, written in there is, "Headed off for Mammoth July 7, 1920." That's 65 years ago. Here's what it says: "Left for Mammoth this morning at 11:30. Picnic lunch in canyon. Arrived at Mojave 4:00 p.m. Got in to Little Lake 9:00 p.m. Spent the night here. Ray and I turned a hose on each other, 180 miles to here." Ray was the chauffeur that Mother had. The group consisted of my stepfather, Russell, Mother, myself, and this young fellow Ray. The next page, July 8th, said, "Left Little Lake at 7:00 a.m. Very, very hot last night."

Stopped at fish hatchery near Independence, arrived here at Mammoth at 5:00 p.m., 160 miles." I see we stayed until August 19th, when we headed home via Yosemite and there is a note, "lost tire near Farrington." That's over by Mono Lake. "Arrived late this evening, temperature 32." I see an entry, a day or two before, reading, "I drove to Bishop in two hours and a half." There, a friend of mine, Burnett Turner, took the train at Laws, which is right near Bishop, and that was on a narrow-gauge. The narrow-gauge only went as far as Lone Pine. Well, actually, it went around at Keeler on the north shore of Owens Lake. Then at Lone Pine you'd get on the regular car which had day coaches and there was also a pullman with berths on it so people could get a night's sleep coming up from Los Angeles and we would meet them in the morning. The standard gauge track laid from Mojave to Lone Pine was mostly paid for by the City of Los Angeles when the aqueduct was first built. It was essential to have rail transportation up as far as the intake near Big Pine.

#### SUMMERS' HOTEL

To jump back a little bit to where I said we had arrived at Mammoth. What I meant was that we had arrived at the Summers' Hotel, a one-story building with a high-pitched roof and all built of logs. There was a big front porch where we would all come out and sit after dinner, a covered porch. Then the main lounge, back of that quite a large dining room with tables scattered around, except that on the north side was a long table where all the ranch hands ate and in those days Lloyd Summers had quite a few cowboys. The cook's name was Billy. He was Chinese.

The waitress' name was Sis Mae. She would come around at dinner and we'd say, "Sis, what have you got?" Sis would say, "the same old thing, T-bone steak, porkchops and lambchops." Of course on Sunday she threw in some chicken. There was always a big white pitcher of cream on the table and the cream was so thick it would hardly pour. That was wonderful at breakfast time and it was made there at the ranch.

The accommodations consisted of three or four little board cottages. Then there was what was called the lodging house. It was a long, two-story building with a tub, wash basin and toilet at each far end of the corridor. Therefore, we found it much better to stay in one of the cottages and we got some boards and built our own shower because the cottage only had a water closet and a wash basin. We built the shower outside and it was a cold water affair supplied by a hose. We did not like to go in the lodging house because the tubs were always very dirty. They did have hot water though and that was an advantage at times. The water was heated from an old boiler they had brought down from one of the mines and it sat out under the trees and had to be fired up with split firewood. Lloyd had a man named Pete Christini whose job it was to keep that boiler going. It had a safety valve on it and every once in awhile Pete would get her a little too hot and it would go off with an awful whistle. The best part was that nobody had to go out and split the wood. They brought it down from huge stacks up by the mine near Mill City. It had been left there from the days they had the big steam engine. Today the steam engine is still up there - the great big

wheel. So every so often they would hitch up a team of horses and go up the old road, you couldn't get a car up there in those days, and load it up with this firewood that was left from the mining days and bring it down.

They did have a truck on the ranch, and it was an air-cooled Franklin. Actually, it was just a big sized pickup. It would go up and down the Sherwin Grade nonstop when all the other cars would be boiling away and stopping for water, and filling their radiators. That damn Franklin was just the perfect thing for up there in that altitude.

I forgot to say anything about Whitmore Tubs. I did say that the tubs in the hotel were dirty, but I never explained that we had another one about five miles down the road. There, near where the little Catholic church is today, and as a matter of fact where the present-day Whitmore swimming pool is, there was a pond in the meadow not over 50 feet long and 20 feet wide. The bottom was covered with pumice and up through the pumice came hot water. It made the little pumice stones dance. We would get in this and soak and it was used by many people, particularly all the cowboys in that area. Lake Crowley was not yet dammed so there were vast meadows and a great many cattle, and lots of cowboys looking after the cattle. They would come up to Whitmore Tubs, throw off their dirty clothes, and usually leave them out in the sagebrush with somebody's car parked out there because there was no shelter and one took their clothes on and off in the open and you'd wait until the people had finished their bath and had gotten up beside their car and dressed and driven off. The

little pond was about three feet deep with steep banks around the edges formed by meadow wire grass. The bottom was covered with pumice, and the little pieces of pumice would dance up and down as the water came up from the bottom. There was really a great flow in and out of the pond. My mother used to take a bottle of shampoo soap with her and one day the bottle slipped out of her hand and a lot of this soap got in the water and colored it all over. We were horrified, but within about, oh, hardly any time at all, certainly no longer than ten minutes, the water in the pond had cleared up because so much water had flowed in and flowed out that it cleansed itself.

When the water had left the pond, it went into a little ditch that led down to a fenced off place where they dipped sheep in a creosote dip, and they would have this hot water and drive the sheep through this wooden chute, and the creosote would of course kill any ticks on the sheep.

I never learned about the gorge and the hot water at Hot Creek in those days or remember that I even learned that one could swim in the gorge there. The history of it sure should be preserved.

Another item where I mentioned about boiling and having to stop so often and fill the radiator, I forgot to say anything about vapor lock and the wonderful remedy we had for it. You know, vapor lock is when the fuel pump gets hot and the gasoline just simply turns to vapor so there is no liquid gasoline in the carbureter for the float to float upon, and the car stops. Well the remedy was to use a half of grapefruit and squash it right

over the fuel pump. The fuel pump was close to the engine, there were no V engines in those days that I can recall. The engine block sat straight up and down with the fuel pump coming out one side of it, easily accessible. So if you would squash a grapefruit over there, immediately the juice and moisture would cool the fuel pump and gasoline would flow into it without vaporizing. Then, you always left the grapefruit skin over it. It made kind of a protection, an insulation, and sort of shrunk itself on as it began to get hot, and that would carry you along for another, oh, maybe twenty miles before you would have to get the other half grapefruit and put it on. Frequently we would have to use the grapefruit method to get up Red Rock Canyon. It was a sand road and was very hard pulling. The road actually was in the bottom of the wash. Then, of course, you needed about two more grapefruit to get up Sherwin Grade and over the hump where the road descended to Rock Creek and there was a beautiful flowing stream of cold water with which you could fill the radiator. But, you would have to wait about 20 minutes until the engine had well cooled off, because putting cold water into the radiator would cause it to crack a cylinder head and many people had such misfortunes. Such trouble occurred when a person did not start his engine first so that the pump would be going and the water circulating when you added the new cold water to it.

I talked about Red Rock Canyon and the road being up the stream bed. One time I was coming home from Haley in a big rainstorm, with a friend named Pat Keeney, who was our excavation foreman. Pat and I got to Red Rock Canyon, southbound, and the

stream was flowing very high. The road, a two-rut road, crossed the stream four times, that is you had to ford it. When we came to the first crossing, Pat and I raised the hood and took off the fanbelt because one enters a stream and the water is deep enough so that the fanblades hit it, why it throws water all over the engine and shorts everything out. Anyway, it was fortunate we did that because we plunged in fairly deeply. Pat would walk ahead with hip boots on and a long handled shovel, and feel for pot holes, so one by one we made all four crossing successfully. Just as we came out, a northbound Shell Oil Company truck, not a great big one as you think of them now days, but a very small tanker, came along. He asked us if we thought he could get through and we said, "Well, we did. There didn't seem to be many too deep potholes". So he left headed toward Little Lake and we headed toward Los Angeles. About four days later, Pat and I returned. The water, of course, had all gone down, but when we got to the second crossing, lo and behold what did we see but the cab of the Shell Oil truck. The truck and the tank on it were completely buried in the sand wash and just about a foot of the cab was sticking out. We assumed he got out all right - never heard anything about him being washed away.

I mentioned Lloyd had a crew of cowboys. I should say old Charlie, his father, ran the ranch. He had three sons, Len, Charlie and Lloyd, and Len conceived the idea of building the hotel. This was completed the year before we got there. The next summer Charlie Summers and his wife ran it, in fact for two years. They got tired of the job and then Lloyd and his wife,



Sibyl, took over and ran it until the day it burned down. The fire was caused by a group of movie people who were lodged there while making a picture and the story seemed to be that they all got drunk one night and somehow a fire got started. But, it sure took it right down to the foundation.

The people who stayed at the hotel were always very nice. There were only accommodations for maybe thirty. And we'd all get to know each other well, greet the newcomers when they came in, and after dinner we'd leave the front porch and take a little walk down the north bank of Mammoth Creek where there was a lovely flowing spring. Somebody made a sign on the front porch telling the chemical contents of the spring and how good it was for one's health, so we went through that ceremony. On the way down to the spring we would pass the ruins of a sawmill which used to be there. This would be now about where Snow Creek has its sign and that road takes off. The sawmill had not been operated for many years. I suppose it was built in the 1880's, and was pretty well rusted up when I first saw it. However, the big rotary saw blades were in pretty good shape. You could hit them with a stick and they would ring like a bell. There was no roof or building left of the sawmill. It all had collapsed and there were a lot of rotten boards on the ground, but it was just the tracks that brought the logs up past the saws that remained.

The T-bone steaks, lambchops and porkchops that I mentioned were all raised on the place. Summers had a slaughter pen not far from the hotel, five or six hundred feet over on the edge of Mammoth Creek, and they would kill these critters there. On days

that they slaughtered the Indians would show up, oh, maybe as many as thirty-five. They used to be camped around the area, some up near where our cabin is today, and I have a vivid recollection of them taking off the head and the tail and putting them in gunnysacks and a lot of entrails, and they would take them down to their camps and boil the heads. Now, the hogs - a hog has to be shaved, even to this day you have to get the hair off a hog. So, they put the hog in the Franklin truck and took it down to Casa Diablo and put it one of those scalding geyser pools down there. They always left it up to a group of Indians to do it. Then, when the hog was well steamed up and the hair was softened, they would pull it up on the bank and had sharp knives and simply shaved the hair off. Then, I remember, before one hog was brought back the Indians taking the head off of it. That was sort of their pay for doing the job. Of course there was no ice house to keep the meat in. It was hung up in sort of a lattice-sided house with screens on it to keep the flies out and the beef would turn black but you could cut off a steak, just the edge was black, and evidently in that dry mountain air, cool enough where the meat just stayed beautifully and was always excellent and very tasty.

Near the slaughter pen there was a little vegetable garden which two Indian squaws tended, and they had quite a supply of vegetables. Onions, carrots, radishes, and I've forgotten what all, but it supplied the dining room tables as far as relishes were concerned.

I mentioned that there was no ice and that the meat had to be hung in a screened house. Well, ice was required Sundays for ice cream. Old Charlie loved ice cream and he would get his truck out and ask who wanted to go along and help and go up to the earthquake crack. The road - there was no road except ruts he had made - or tracks he had made from time to time, and every time he'd get stuck and tore the road out, the next time he'd make another road. So as you approached the earthquake crack trying to get up that hill, there were five or six routes to take. Generally, the gang would get off and push the truck and we'd get it up there. Then we would go down in the earthquake crack and fill big gunnysacks with the snow that was in the bottom. Of course the snow was practically solid ice and you had to pick it. We would bring it back and he had quite a big ice cream freezer which had an electric motor on it and he would make wonderful ice cream. The electricity was self-made there on the place. To this day a little Pelton wheel stands by the little white log cabin near where the hotel used to be. Lights used to fluctuate as the voltage rose and fell and sometimes it would cut out entirely due to a trout getting in the nozzle of the Pelton wheel and Lloyd or Charlie would have to get out there with a rod and clean it out so the water would squirt on the buckets again. He always shut the generator down at bedtime and it did not run overnight so if you got up you had to use a candle in your room or kerosene lamps which were also furnished in case of a broken belt or something got caught. So when you got up at night you had to light a candle in your room.

In those days they called a generator a dynamo. In the daytime when no electricity was being used, the little dynamo had enough capacity to run a couple of electric washing machines. These were in the little white house between the hotel and the creek and on that Mammoth Music Festival poster a couple of years ago, the little white house with the red roof is shown. In fact, it still stands there. Three or four Indian squaws did all the laundry work. They sure thought it was great to have one of these electric washing machines instead of the scrub board that they used at road camps when they would go down to the creek to wash.

Earlier I mentioned scalding and shaving the hogs down at Casa Diablo. I remember that there was a shooting geyser there in those days. It would shoot a good 100 feet up in the air. On cold mornings the steam rose and it was quite a sight. There was a little marshy place just west of the geyser all full of bullrushes and the Indians used to come in to soak and cure their arthritis and what not and they would get down in this mud and tie the bullrushes into a little - they called it a wickiup - and they would stay in there all night - all day too. There were a lot of little holes where a little steam came up in the cliff right near the geyser and the Indians would take wooden boxes and put over the holes and use it like a steam oven and cook their food. Quite a few Indian families camped in the area. They were Indians from around Bishop but during the summer months they always came up to the cool air around Mammoth and when it got cold they went down to Shelton Valley and out around Laws in the Bishop vicinity.

### SAN JOAQUIN CAMPING

The next year, 1921, we went back again to Mammoth on July 16th. Our log cabin was not built until 1927. So, these earlier years we used to make a tent camp down in the San Joaquin near Soda Springs, just upsteam from Devil's Post Pile, and we had good tents and we would stay there for ten days at a time. We had to pack everything in from the hotel, leaving from the stable with the horses, and pack this stuff all the way up to the summit and then all the way down. There was a zig-zag trail; but, you got down pretty fast. Very few campers were in the San Joaquin Valley then. I say San Joaquin Valley, but I mean the north fork of San Joaquin, which is the stream that goes from Devil's Post Pile, Rainbow Falls, and so forth.

That summer the William Breckinridge family from Pasadena were at Mammoth. Mr. Breckinridge was president of the Edison Company at the time. He had two daughters about my age and a much younger boy. We went on lots of picnics with them and fished the Owens River frequently, staying for picnics. We would always broil chicken in what was called a reflector oven. It folded up and when you unfolded it it was a V-shaped thing with a shelf in the middle. You would put it near the fire and the heat from the fire would reflect on the shiny tin and cook the chicken on both sides. One time Mr. Breckinridge arranged with the Southern Sierra Power Company to have us leave Farrington Ranch and we got on a wagon which was loaded with hay and a two-horse team and went up to Walker Lake. That was excellent fishing and I guess little Walker Lake always has been good fishing.

Toward the end of that stay, a friend of mine, Burnett Turner, was to come up from Los Angeles and we had reserved a guide and horses for a trip to Virginia Lake, in the back country. At the last minute Burnett couldn't come, but the family urged me to go ahead alone with the guide who was an old Indian named Dave Jackson. These Indians always took the name of some white man whom they had worked for. Dave was on Lloyd's payroll and tended the horses there by the hotel and took people on trips. Dave and I got to Purple Lake and it started to rain. We had no tents but we put up a tarpolin to shelter ourselves and we were sitting waiting for the rain to stop and I noticed a great big log raft down on the lake and I said to Dave, "I guess some fishermen built that but they built it so big you can hardly pull it around. It's as big as a steamboat." Dave said, "Steamboat. What do you mean?" I said, "A boat that runs with a steam engine." Dave said, "You mean like over at the sawmill?" I said, "Yes! They have great big boats that cross the ocean and go to Europe and France." He said, "France. Is that where Frenchie the sheepherder comes from?" "Well," I said, "I don't know him, but I guess so." Dave was very interested in all this and then he decided he should reciprocate so he told me how once there was a saying - "Did you know that all the animals came from Paiute Indians?" I said, "No, what do you mean?" "Well," he said, "one time there was a big flood and only the upper part of Mt. Whitney was above the water." My grandfather told me this before he died. All the Paiutes went up Mt. Whitney and when the

waters finally went down, one of the braves and his squaw - they say 'We be bear' - another fella his squaw - they say 'We be deer'," and he said, "so only animals came from the Paiute Indians after this great big flood." That sort of beats the Noah's Ark story, I thought.

In 1922 we did not go to Mammoth. here. I graduated from Hotchkiss and the family took me to Europe with my cousin, Laura Hodge. She was a member of the Law family. But in August, 1923, we went back to Mammoth again and it still took an hour and 50 minutes to get to Bishop from Mammoth. The time going up must have been well over two hours and a half because of so many stops for boiling on the Sherwin Grade.

#### SELECTING A CABIN SITE

In 1924, Lloyd Summers decided to put in a subdivision of some lots and call it the Mammoth Camp Tract. We went up to see the area. The subdivision was to extend south and up on the cliffs near old Mill City. We were quite taken with the view and the location up there and Mother decided to have him make one extra large lot of about three acres. It still shows on the record map to this day with Taylor Street running along the side. However, in time, we realized the water supply was not too dependable up there. Lloyd was to bring the water from the tunnel at the mine and then break the fall by putting a line in from tank to tank as it came down the mountain. He had that in the next year and the line was breaking and there were all sorts of problems. So, Mother decided the safest thing to do was to locate on Mammoth Creek. We went down there and picked the 7-1/2 acres which we have today.

However, prior to all this, there was some discussion as to whether or not it might be desirable to built a cabin on Lake George. A Ranger, whose name was Guy Way, decided to put a road from Lake Mary up to Lake George. Mother contributed, it was less than \$500. I think it was \$300. We filed for a Forestry lease. So, all the plans of the cabin were made and all the furniture was purchased the following Spring, when suddenly we got notice from the Forestry Department in San Francisco that they were going to use the Lake George area for the public and no more private leases would be available on the east side of the lake. They did at least make a couple of leases on the southwest side of the lake, where some cabins are to this day. But, there was no road over to them. Those people had to carry everything over by boat, including their building materials. so that discouraged us from considering that.

That's when we decided to build the log cabin and we could start right away because the blueprints and all had been made for the cabin which was to be built at Lake George. So, we let the contract to Carlton Tibbons and Ed Chamberlain, and I remember that it was \$5,000 for the cabin, garage and little house. A few logs were cut on the place, but the Forestry Department required that we get our logs over in the Dry Creek area. This was done and they were hauled over two, sometimes three, at a time by a little Ford tractor that had two wheels on a dolly sticking way back a long length behind it. So, in the summer of 1926, the cabin was erected but the roofing was not put on nor was any



flooring put in it because Ed Chamberlain, the head carpenter, said that the logs would need to get their natural repose and he wanted it to fill up with snow during that winter. He said he had made a mistake when he built the cabins at Valentine Camp by going right ahead and roofing and flooring them because they settled and they had lots of trouble. However, ours stayed open to the weather, the logs took their natural repose, and in the summer of 1927 he chinked them and finished up the interior.

I was not there when the construction work was going on because in June 1926, when Chamberlain started to build it, I had graduated from Yale and the family planned a transcontinental motor trip through Canada to Vancouver Island, where we spent a wonderful time at Sproat Lake. After arriving home, I went to work in September for what was then called the Bureau of Power and Light and is now the Department of Water and Power. I got the job in a rather unique way. At that time Ezra Scattergood was Chief Engineer for the Bureau of Power and Light and in Brown's Mill, New Jersey, where I spent a lot of my boyhood, the station agent was named Scattergood Taylor. He was a cousin of this Ezra Scattergood, and Scattergood had told me to be sure and look up his cousin if I wanted work in engineering when I got to Los Angeles. So, I went into see Ezra Scattergood, told him that his cousin had asked me to call on him and darned if I didn't get signed up as a level man in a survey party in San Francisquita Canyon, which is just north of Saugus and where the Department was just getting ready to put in a tunnel, a long penstock, and an addition to the powerhouse.

BUREAU OF POWER AND LIGHT

I worked there about 2-1/2 months on the preliminary layout, and then was transferred to Little Lake, at the Haley Powerhouse at the downstream end of Haley Reservoir. The party chief there was a fellow named Gil Bergstrom who had become critically ill, and they needed a new party chief up there right away and I really got a break by taking Gil's place. It was the middle of the winter when I arrived at Haley, and you couldn't go on to Mammoth from Bishop because the road was not plowed up the Sherwin Grade in those days. In fact, there was no way to get to Reno after the snows came. We were making good progress with the construction work on the Haley Power Plant when suddenly the Owens Valley ranchers started dynamiting the aqueduct. They set off eleven blasts in all. We had to make the repairs, so I was really tied down at Haley until summer.

The first blast occurred at what was called No-Name Siphon. That was about eight miles down the aqueduct from Little Lake. The first I knew of it was when I was coming out of the mess hall after breakfast. An Indian whom I knew, named Tom Sides, who was a patrolman along the lower section of the aqueduct, came rushing up to our Superintendent, Tom Reagan, and said the aqueduct had blown up. "I could not get here because the roads were cut and I could not phone you because they've torn down the telephone line," he said. But he said to go up to the dam at Haley Reservoir and shut off the water right away. So, Reagan dispatched several fellows up there and a group of us got in his

car and we went down five or six miles below Little Lake and we could see the train smoke. It was a northbound train and it had come to where the water had run out and washed out the tracks and highway. There were no cars coming northbound either and Tom Sides explained to us the only way he could get up to report it to us was to wait until a southbound car came. Well, at 1:00 a.m. when the blast occurred, there weren't many people driving down the Owens Valley, so poor Tom had to wait until the first guy came down the valley and then he got him to turn around and bring him up to Haley. We had a 300-man camp at Haley and a full steel crew because they were laying about a mile and one-half of riveted steel pipe, the same type of 8-foot diameter pipe that had been blasted up in the syphon. When we got down there, the water was coming down the ravine and cut the highway and the railroad. But we were able to take the two-rut road up close to the siphon and we walked on up to it.

The siphon was on concrete piers. It came down to the bottom of the canyon, and then up the other side and into a tunnel. It was not a true siphon, but an inverted siphon. Water came out of one tunnel and simply went down the pipe to the bottom of the canyon and up the next canyon wall into another tunnel. When we walked back to our car, (I had a 4-cylinder City Dodge - an open top touring car). I found the Water Department crew, in our absence, had already got there and brought a telephone - an old-fashioned, hand-crank telephone, and had strapped it to the bollus at the top and they were already talking to the Los Angeles office. So, I got on the phone, and

the man at the other end I knew, and he said "Well, how many piers down does the break start?" He said, "I've got a blueprint in front of me. Count the piers." So, we looked up there, counted down and told him, and he said, "Well, how about the downstream side of the canyon? How many piers down is that?" So, we told him and as I learned later that very day they placed the orders with four steel companies which were in Los Angeles in those days, and in less than a week the trucks began rolling into camp with new sections of pipe, ninety-six inches in diameter - that's eight feet in diameter. Of course in the bottom was quite heavy steel because of more water pressure. We established a tent camp there and a cookhouse, and in three weeks the Siphon was repaired and the water was coming down to Los Angeles again.

#### RANCHERS VERSUS THE CITY

We were, naturally, afraid of more dynamiting. The ranchers were infuriated because they had recently sold their ranches to the city who wanted to acquire the water rights and had only had their money in the Waterson Bank in Bishop a short time when the bank failed. So, the poor ranchers had lost their ranches and the money they got for them besides and they wanted revenge. Fearing violence, the Water Department backed a train into the Ducommon Street warehouse yards here in Los Angeles where they loaded on a lot of war veterans who had had military training. The train was to proceed to Lone Pine and they were to get off there and be scattered around the aqueduct. My boss, R. R. Robertson, had been a major in World War I. He was put in charge of the guards. Robbie phoned me from Los Angeles and said

that the conductor on the train had instructions to stop and unload at Lone Pine but that he and some others decided it was a bad thing to unload armed men in a town and that we should stop the train at Haley Reservoir. Accordingly, another fellow, Myron Dougherty, and I got in my car and we went up over the dam to the tracks where there was a water tower. The trains were steam engines in those days and the train always stopped there to fill up with water for the boilers. So we waited by the water tower and we could see the headlights coming way down the valley. We had some red lanterns we had taken with us, so we set those across the track and held a couple to wave, and we got the train stopped.

Actually, it had arrived a lot quicker than we had expected it to. The captain in charge got off and we told him that Major Robinson had requested the train be stopped there and the men not be unloaded at Lone Pine. The front two cars had their equipment. One was loaded with machine guns and rifles and the other was loaded with these great big search lights like they used to use on used car lots for advertising. They had been loaned by Walter K. Olson, who was in the business of renting those lights in town. This captain in charge began to give orders for the men to go to the car, get their guns and surround the train. We told them that our trucks would be coming to take the men down to our camp where they would be fed and held a while until they were sent out. But the trucks did not come so Myron Dougherty and I decided to go down and see what was up. As soon as we got to the dam, we could see the headlights of the trucks

that were coming. So we turned around - hell, we were half, three-quarters of a mile from the train - and started back to the train when suddenly two fellows jumped out in the road and pointed hand-held machine guns at us. We were pretty much concerned that they might be trigger happy, but I shut off my engine and we shouted to them who we were, and what it was about, so they finally lowered their guns and let us pass. We went back up to the train and waited for the trucks' arrival. It was a close call.

I don't remember how many were on that train, whether there were over a hundred or not, but there was quite a string of dump trucks loaded up with men and we took them down to our mess house and they were fed. Later that night our trucks took the search lights and went to the various canyons and siphons and proceeded to set up sandbagged machine gun emplacements. At the Haley Dam itself there was a gate tower in the reservoir, about 150 feet from the crest of the dam, with a suspension bridge walkway out to it. If anybody got out there and dropped an explosive down, that would be it. So our electricians quickly hot-wired this bridge. They laid some metal lath on the floor and I don't know what all, but anybody would be electrocuted immediately that went out there. So that was taken care of in a hurry.

The armed guards were posted at strategic spots where more dynamiting could occur for, I think, nearly two months. We ourselves did not dare drive in to Lone Pine. We just stayed in camp at night. On one occasion word got to us that some of the ranchers had trucked quite a few horses into a little pocket over

the mountains from us called Cactus Flat and a truckload of saddles had been seen coming out of Lone Pine, and they were to saddle up, ride over the ridge, and blow up the gates of our Haley Dam. We all got pretty tensed up about it, but there was nothing to it. Nothing ever happened.

By May things had pretty well quieted down, but there was still too much snow for me to get into Mammoth to see the cabin and I suppose it was probably the 4th of July when I met Mother and Russell up there and that is the first time I saw the cabin all nicely finished.

#### MISS KAGY LOWERS THE BOOM

There is one thing I should have mentioned. After I was suddenly transferred from San Francisquita Canyon to take over this sick guy's job at Haley (I am pretty sure that was in February, 1927). I got up to the hotel in Little Lake and went in to have dinner. The man who owned it was named Bill Bramlet, and they always served wonderful meals, family style at a table, and charged one silver dollar. I guess it didn't have to be silver, but we always had silver dollars in our pockets in those days. When I finished dinner, I went out to get in my car and proceeded eight or ten miles to the construction camp at Haley Power Plant. I noticed that my motor meter was missing from the top of the radiator cap. It was quite noticeable because the round motor meter was mounted on a pair of chromium eagle wings. So, I went in back to the hotel to tell Bramlet, and as I went back in the door I noticed the glass was smashed on the cigar counter. Bramlet came out of the dining room, saw it too and we

both rushed out the door because a little campfire was going between the parking place and the railroad track and we went down to see who was there, thinking they had been the ones who had come in and done the damage. There were some Mexicans cooking their beans there, and they said, "Oh, no, we did not do it, senores. We saw two men and a woman go in and come out of the hotel and they have gone up the road muy rapido in their Chevrolet coupe." Bramlet rushed over to his garage building, just a short distance from the hotel, and told his mechanic, a man named Lee King, to get Bill's Lincoln out, and we started in pursuit of these two men and the girl. I was following the Lincoln without any radiator cap on and the water kept splashing out and going over my windshield and the dust from Bramlet's Lincoln, of course, made it a coat of mud. However, it didn't take us long to overtake this Chevy coupe. King pulled out into the sagebrush and went around them. Actually, the road we were traveling was nothing more than two sand ruts. Then Bramlet, who was accustomed to wild driving on the desert because he had been given the Lincoln by the Ford Motor Car Company for winning the road race from Phoenix to Bishop with it the year before - anyway they got the Chevy coupe stopped and these two men and the girl - I even remember her name - Miss Kagy - got out. They were all half drunk and had a galvanized milk can of bootleg whiskey in the back seat. We started to put them into Bramlet's Lincoln touring car and Miss Kagy, I suppose, being a lady, started in first and just as she put her foot on the running board she hit me over the head with a flashlight and knocked me out for a few



seconds. I fell stunned in the sand and in the excitement the other two men ran off in the dark. Bramlet, King and I soon recovered our senses and the first thing we heard was the voice of one of the men out in the pitch black night call in to Miss Kagy to pick up a rock and smash the headlights, he was coming in. Well, Miss Kagy picked up a rock all right. She threw it at my car first but missed, so the lights remained burning on both my Dodge and Bill's Lincoln. The two men did walk up to the road to their car, raised the trunk and took something out and went off in the sagebrush with it. It occurred to me they had probably taken out a gun, so I said to Bramlet, who was on the far side of the road, "For God's sakes, Bill, shoot and scare them away. They're going to pick us off. They probably took a gun out of that car." Well, in the pitch dark, Bill couldn't see anything to shoot at, so he told King, "take the Lincoln and go up to Cowan's." That was a service station about four, maybe five miles further up the road. He told him to call for the sheriff, that Bramlet and I would stay there and keep the girl and these men from driving off by simply threatening to shoot them with Bill's rifle. I, incidentally, had a Colt .38 revolver. However, I had lost it for a short time when Miss Kagy hit me over the head. I had dropped the revolver in the sand and it took me a little while to find it. It seemed endless, but finally we saw lights coming down the road and was the Lincoln. Sure enough it was, and Cowan's was kind of a bootleg hangout bar and the cowboys used to come in there evenings, so King had

gotten three to come with him. So then, we were pretty well reinforced.

He had a phone, actually it was a Water Department phone, and we were able to call the sheriff in Independence. The sheriff said he would start down with a couple of men right away. We sat around a big stove burning greasewood in Cowan's which was sort of a grocery store, a bar and whatnot. Actually, this guy, Cowan, had been a peddler on the aqueduct and around 1909, I was told, he had a couple of covered wagons and he used to carry gloves and Levis and other equipment to sell the men who were the tunnel crews and men working on the aqueduct. Well, after a while the Sheriff arrived and took Miss Kagy and her boyfriends away and we went back to Haley Camp and went to bed. In due time I had to appear in court in Independence to testify. Just before Miss Kagy had conked me with a flashlight, she had scratched me with her nails down the side of my cheeks as I was trying to force her into the car. The next thing she did was was shout, "You little yellow-haired son-of-a-bitch, I'll kick your nuts off," and so I pulled her pointed shoes off and threw them out in the brush. Well, in court there were women on the jury and the district attorney asked me to recite the threat Miss Kagy had made and I froze in my reply and then the D.A. helped me out by saying, "Well, did she threaten to injure you in your private parts?" and I said, "Yes", and that was that. The sheriff put Miss Kagy, after they were sentenced, to work in the jail and she waited on tables for the sheriff and his family. Now and then the sheriff used to ask people I knew to dinner and they would

always come back and tell me that they had seen Miss Kagy waiting on tables. I think they were only in jail for three months. Anyway, I knew they were to get out and their car had been left or impounded at Cowan's. I knew they would be down that valley that far to get it and since Miss Kagy had said, "I'll never forget your license number, and Blackie will get you," I decided to stay in camp for the several days around their release date. My license number at that time, I think, was 333555. Anyway, it hangs in our garage at Hudson Place on a board with a lot of old license numbers.

Actually, it wasn't until I suppose after 9 o'clock at night that I arrived and checked in at Haley Camp with a nice fellow named Tom Silvius, who was sort of the business manager of the camp and ran the commissary. He saw me with these nail scratches and dried blood on my face and wanted to know what on earth had happened.

Tom walked me over the bunkhouse I had been assigned to, and I knew some of the fellows in it and, of course, they were astounded to see me scratched up. They were still up having a poker game. After a few days, I was assigned to a nice little bunkhouse, that is, one end of it had a bed with another fellow and the front part was a drafting table and blueprint room, and so forth. All the bunkhouses leaked sand in a sand storm or wind storms. They were portable and they had been built in Los Angeles and trucked up in sections and were bolted together. The wall was no thicker than 1/2 to 3/4 inch redwood drop siding. Each bunkhouse was heated by what was meant to be a wood stove.

They were like the ones in the bathrooms at Mammoth only about half again as big. But, instead of putting wood or coal in them, they just ran the diesel fuel in and it would burn a good blue flame. They were quite noisy. In fact, they roared. There were eight or ten cots in each bunkhouse down each of the walls, and you didn't have to make your beds. The crumbuck - that is what he was called - came in and made the beds and tidied up and swept the floors.

#### THE ST. FRANCIS DAM FAILURE

Earlier I described No-Name Siphon being dynamited by the irate ranchers. I did not give a date. I have looked it up and that was May 27, 1927. Shortly after we had made repairs, the steel crew was moved down to San Francisquito Canyon Power Plant 1, and a new camp was established there about half way up the hill between the powerhouse and the search chamber where there was a level spot. Many of the buildings were dismantled at Haley and brought down and put up again there at Power Plant 1. I had my same little bunkhouse, half of which was a bedroom, the other half a blueprint room, and it had a wonderful view. Our job was to run a new penstock down the hill with a vertical drop of 900 feet. The penstock itself must have been 1500 feet long. Our work progressed right along, but on March 12, 1928, a tragic happening occurred. St. Francis Dam failed. We first learned of this about 10 minutes after midnight when the phone rang in the blueprint room. I got up and it was the night operator at the powerhouse at the foot of the mountain below us. He said there was a big surge on the transmission line and he tried to get

Power House 2 to find out what, if anything, was wrong and could not get them on the phone. He said he had no one to send down there and could some of us drive down and see what was what at Power Plant 2.

Three of us got in my little Dodge roadster and after driving about a mile we were at the upper end of the reservoir. Our headlights, fortunately, showed that the road had sluffed off, it was along the shore of the reservoir, and had made a little landslide in the reservoir and there was no water that we could see. It was just a mud flat out there. Our first thought was that a retaining wall portion of the dam on top of a ridge might have failed and possibly lowered the water some 15 feet, but we turned around instantly and went back up the hill to our camp and blew the fire sirens. I ran over to the truck drivers' bunkhouse and told them to get their trucks going and load as many as they could in and we would start down to Power Plant 1 but that we would take the transmission-line road which went up over the hills because we had found that the other road was severed. The road that we took was called the Bee Canyon Road and it wound and turned, but finally we got down to the search chamber directly above Power Plant 2 at the end of that tunnel. We got out of the cars and looked down the hill and the whole powerhouse was gone and we could see that there must have been an awful lot of water pass through the canyon. Two of us thought we heard voices calling, so Henry Outermill and I started to go down along the side of the penstock which led to the powerhouse. As we got over the next little brow we could see the power plant, or

where it had been, completely demolished. One of the vertical generators was still running and the exciter on top the generator was cherry red with heat and steam was rising from it. As we proceeded only a little further we came to a spot where the sagebrush had all been washed away and the hill was slippery with mud so we knew the water had to have been up that high. A few days later it was determined that the depth of the water over the powerhouse was 122 feet. When we got back to the caretaker's house, the search chamber, the high line patrolmen had arrived and over the radio on his truck he had been in contact with the Los Angeles office. Some of the people there said they were just leaving for the Water Department's warehouse in Saugus and would some of us come in and meet them and show them the way back to the search chamber.

We left in two cars, none of us knowing the road or having traveled it before. In the dark we would keep coming to turnoffs and we never knew whether we were on the main road or not, but finally we got to Saugus, and it was was a madhouse. A freight train was blocking the entrance to the warehouse gateyard, but we were able to work our way around it and get into the office. A few minutes after our arrival, the group from Los Angeles arrived. Without wasting much time, we started off to lead them back to where we had come from. It was harder doing this, by that I mean to know which pair of ruts were the road leading to where we wanted to go, so many little shoefly roads kept turning off. But, I guess they always came back to the main road because we did eventually get back to the search chamber. By then, dawn

was just breaking and as it became lighter we could see two people on a little hilltop in the bottom of the canyon and a big white mule. There was no longer any water to speak of flowing down the stream bed and the reservoir had completely emptied itself.

Eight or ten of us went down there and the main group was ahead of another fellow and myself. By the time we got there they had gotten to this hilltop where we had seen two people and found, a fellow named Rising, and a woman. She was the wife of one of the powerhouse operators. It later was determined that her husband was lost. Each gave the same story, namely, that they had been awakened by a roaring sound and realized it was water flowing down the canyon. They had each left their houses, and I remember this fellow Rising said that he started to climb a trail on the hill beside his house and water kept about even with his knees as he went up the trail. It was rising that fast. Anyway, he and this woman had gotten to the top of this hill and so were saved. There were 42 people in the little power plant village and 40 were drowned. Although badly scratched from brush, this couple were able to walk back up the trail aided by some of the group and were put to bed in the caretaker's house at the top.

Many of us then went back to the bottom of the canyon to look for survivors. There were a few bodies lying around caught in the rocks. One I'll never forget was a little boy half buried in the sand and he had a school bag over his shoulder with his books in it. I guess he thought of his school books when he was awakened by the rush of water.

About midmorning word was received that the coroner could not possibly get up there because from Castaic down through Fillmore 400 people had been drowned. So they asked us to gather the bodies that we came across. By then everybody from our camp was down there. There must have been 150 searchers. Fortunately, the old tramway ties had been left up the hillside when they had built Power Plant 2. So the carpenter crew got 2 x 6's and nailed them on the railroad ties like rails and then they built a little skip car out of lumber and brought a hoist in quickly so we had a tramway going up the hill on which the bodies were loaded. Out of the 40 of our group, I don't think there were over 6 or 7 bodies brought out. The rest could not be found. All were buried or washed downstream. By late afternoon supply trucks began to arrive, having come over the same transmission-line road that we had taken earlier that morning to Saugus. The trucks had food on them, tents, and all of sorts of emergency equipment. We had had nothing to eat all day, so about nightfall a fellow named Orville Nave and I opened a case of eggs on the truck and a big box that had great big cheeses in it. We cut ourselves a piece of cheese and ate raw eggs and as it started to drizzle and rain lightly we crawled under the truck and wound up spending the night under there.

#### THE AFTERMATH

By the following afternoon, we were in good shape for shelter because one of the trucks had brought in a lot of lumber and the carpenters built a first aid house. A nurse named



Katherine Spanne took charge of minor injuries that occurred as rescue workers hurt themselves in their scrambles up and down the hillside. This first aid shelter was fairly spacious. They got the roof on in a hurry because of the rain. The sides were not all on, but several of us were able to sleep in it that night on cots and good mattresses which had been brought out. Also, a lot of blankets had been brought. Somebody found a kerosene stove on one of the trucks and they had found coffee and utensils someplace and early in the evening we had hot coffee and more food that we got from the trucks. To replenish the fuel in the kerosene stove, I had gotten a bung out of a barrel of kerosene that had been on one of the trucks and filled a great big 2-gallon canteen with kerosene and hung it up inside the shelter. The next morning a friend thought he would pitch in and make the coffee and thought there was water in the canteen. So, he poured kerosene into the coffee pot, unwittingly it being dark, and nobody found that out until we poured the coffee and smelled the most potent stuff anyone ever brewed.

The next night we all slept back at the Power Plant 1 camp and commuted each morning over the transmission-line road down to Power Plant 2. We did this for a number of weeks while workers commenced to rebuild Powerhouse 2. One of the generators and turbines had been shut off at midnight just a few minutes before the flood washed away the powerhouse. It was a vertical unit and was anchored to bedrock so remained in place and one was fairly easy to repair. They had it back on the line in a couple of months. One, when the flood hit it, kept running and of course

it ground out the bearings with sand and debris and that took, I guess, six months before they got it rebuilt. In the meantime they started to rebuild the powerhouse and used a new type of form for the concrete. It was called a slip form and it operated on jacks. They would pour about 3 feet and then jack the forms up before the concrete fully set and they got the whole building completed in, I can't remember exactly, but it might have been two months. They had me mount my movie camera on a concrete pedestal on the hill, pointed at the power plant, and take about three frames about every hour. I had a young fellow go up and press the button on the camera. When the film was completed it showed the powerhouse growing up like a mushroom. This was done simply to illustrate the advantage of this new slip form process.

Six or eight huge transformers that were inside the powerhouse had been washed down the canyon by the flood waters. Some were visible, and others were found by using a magnet. So they were excavated and repaired, overhauled, and used again. They really weren't damaged too badly. Huge chunks of concrete from the dam washed down the canyon like pebbles. When I say huge, I mean some as big as a house. The dam was 209 feet high, or a little more, with serpentine rock in the foundation, and the crack went up the wall of the dam, whereupon the west side toppled over, then as the water rushed out of the reservoir it pulled around the east abutment and it broke loose there. But, when it was all over, the center part of the dam remained erect. It was a section about 150 feet wide. Later the Water Department dynamited it, toppled it over, and kept dynamiting it until all

the concrete was broken up. They did the same thing with all the big chunks that rolled down, the point being to erase for all time the memory of the terrible disaster. However, to this day, one can drive up there and see these big chunks that were dynamited as naturally mounds of the material remained.

The dam was 175 feet thick at its base and stood 209 feet high. As an additional safety factor, it arched upstream. In other words, it was what was called a gravity-arch dam. So it had the strength components of both an arch and a trapezoidal mass. The dam was not very old. It was commenced in 1924, so it only stood until March 1928, just about four years.

Mr. Mulholland himself arrived with the supply trucks. I remember the sun was out, probably 9:00 in the morning. As he got out of his car, he stood there with a cane and he was just shaking. Two books have been written on the St. Francis Dam, one is called Man Made Disaster, the Story of St. Francis Dam by Charles Outland. My name is mentioned in it several times. Also, there is a second book, William Mulholland, Our Forgotten Forefather by Robert Matson. Matson interviewed me when he wrote his book, and as a matter of fact, Outland did too. This was maybe twenty years after the dam had failed. My name got into both of these books, appearing several places with quotations and so forth.

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Russell D. Keely  
General Partner

9/04/09

Walter Hays

I hope you enjoy my  
dad's memories - esp.  
of DWP & the  
dam failures. He later  
was a DWP commissioner

Maybe should be in

DWP Library

See you soon

Rusty

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