

Excerpts from;

"With Curry's Compliments  
The story of Abraham Curry"

By

Doris Cerveri 1990

## Roots of Carson City and Downieville

With years of experience as a successful businessman, however, Curry was wise enough to realize that a mining community did not offer financial security, no matter how lively it seemed. Although he had had no mining experience, it is possible that he felt the same excitement and anticipation that hundreds of other individuals did, and was fascinated by the thought of getting rich quick. He was able, though, to observe first hand the disappointment and disillusionment of many men when a mine produced only surface gold or silver and subsequently became barren. People moved away from Red Dog after the mines were exhausted and nearly all the buildings, including the Odd Fellows Hall, were moved to nearby You Bet, which boomed by 1860. Three years later, You Bet and Red Dog were consolidated.

During Curry's stay in Red Dog he operated a ten-pin bowling alley and, on March 24, 1856, organized the first tribe of the Improved Order of Red Men in California. Meetings of the Red Men were held in the hayloft of a livery stable owned by the Brooklyn Lodge of the Odd Fellows. Curry and the other Red Men made their own regalia out of ground squirrel and fox skins, as there were no companies in the state at that time to supply their needs.

Curry reportedly also spent some time in Grass Valley, but this has not been authenticated. One thing is certain: Curry was not satisfied with either San Francisco, Red Dog or Grass Valley. Consequently, in 1857, he and Charles joined the hordes, of individuals then travelling a rough, narrow road to Downieville. Rich ore was being found everywhere at the new camp. It seemed like everyone had rich claims, and with so much money in circulation, businesses sprang up like mushrooms after a rainstorm. In 1851, the National Theatre was built in back of the town's Lower Plaza by a Mr. Morris. (This is mentioned particularly because it has been written in numerous articles that Curry built Downieville's first theatre. It has also been written that Curry constructed the first livery stable, but William W. White built and operated an express and livery stable in 1852 before Curry's arrival.)

The lure of gold did not entice Curry into mining during his short time in the various mining communities. Instead, during the period he was in Downieville, he undertook some construction work. On April 10, 1858, he contracted with the Mountain Shade Lodge, Masonic Order, to build a room or hall in the second story of a building then being erected by Curry (and known as Curry's Building) on the north side of the Lower Plaza in Downieville. It was to be ready by June 1, 1858, and the contract stipulated that after its completion Curry was to be paid \$60 a month

rent for two years.

Curry and his son owned real estate in Downieville which they later sold to finance their move to Nevada Territory, although there is no record of such transactions found at the Downieville courthouse. There is, however, no denying that it was in Downieville that fate took a definite hand in shaping Curry's future. It was there that he met the men who travelled with him when he first went to Nevada. Three of them, Benjamin F. Green, Francis ("Frank") Marion Proctor and John J. Musser, had lived in the Downieville area for several years before the Currys arrived. These men, and Curry, became active in early Carson City affairs and, although their interests were different, they remained friends throughout their lifetimes. Frank Green, Ben's brother, W. B. Hickok, and Capt. William T. Ferguson, also made the trip over the Sierra to Nevada with the others.

The first record of Benjamin F. Green in Downieville appears when he was a partner with Henry Purdy in the jewelry and watchmaking business. Green also transacted some county business and he served as county treasurer in 1857. Proctor, an attorney, married Green's daughter, Caroline, on December 31, 1857 in Downieville, but maintained a home in Forest City. Proctor was quite active in political affairs. In October, 1852, he served on the first grand jury for the court of sessions in Downieville and was county assessor in 1855. Musser, also an attorney, was district attorney of Sierra County in 1856-57.

In Downieville during 1857, there were rumors that an army was being sent from Washington to put down a possible Mormon rebellion in Salt Lake City because Brigham Young and the federal government had failed to agree on numerous issues. It was further rumored that Young had sent word to all his Mormon colonies: "Dispose of your property, come in one company, let us all keep together so that we can protect ourselves against all foes, red and white. Soon, stories of the Mormon exodus from western Utah Territory, the area that is now Nevada, were in all of the California newspapers and some of the men who hadn't found riches in the gold fields travelled to that region to try their luck. With most of the Mormons gone from it, western Utah offered unlimited possibilities for an opportunist with plans for a prosperous future.

Curry, his son Charles, Musser, Frank Green, Proctor, Hickok and Captain Ferguson left Downieville some time during the early spring of 1858, and, like others, went over the mountains to take a look at Utah Territory. They stopped at Steamboat Hot Springs, approximately twenty miles from present day Carson City, and then moved on to Washoe Lake, where they did some fishing. At Franktown, the men found a small Mormon settlement in which Orson Hyde had erected a crude "tabernacle." There was another small settlement in Eagle Valley. Curry's party did not stop there but went directly on to Genoa in Carson Valley.

There is no record of how long the group stayed in the area, but it was probably just a few days. At the time, Carson Valley had sufficient water, tall grass and fertile soil to provide a substantial living for any settler. Curry, Proctor, Green and Musser were favorably impressed, for when they went back to Downieville they made plans to return to Utah Territory.

## CHAPTER 2

## First Years in Nevada

In July, 1858, Curry and his son, Charles, accompanied by Musser, Proctor, and Frank and Benjamin F. Green, left Downieville and crossed the Sierra by stagecoach to Genoa. Musser, Proctor and Green's wives remained in Downieville; Curry's family was still in the East.

A popular explanation of their settling in Eagle Valley is of Curry's offering \$1,000 for a corner lot in Genoa where he planned to build a store. The property owners would not accept his offer so he and his companions left and travelled to the next valley to the north.

Eagle Valley was not as attractive as Carson Valley. As far as the eye could see there was nothing but scrubby stands of sagebrush and other desert flora. There were only a few patches of stunted grass and not a tree in sight. By 1857 so much livestock was driven through the valley by pioneers on their way to California that the supply of grass was depleted.

Before the Mormons left the area, a group of men including Joseph and Frank Barnard, George Follensbee, A. J. Rollins, and Frank and W. L. Hall, established a trading post in the valley called the King Ranch. When Frank Hall shot an eagle and mounted it over his cabin door the place became known as the Eagle Ranch; the valley subsequently also took the name Eagle. Situated in a circular basin, the ranch consisted of several thousand acres bounded by the Warm Springs (where the Nevada State Prison was later located), present day Minnesota Street and the mountains.

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