Before the Comstock, 1857–1858: Memoirs of William Hickman Dolman

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WILLIAM HICKMAN DOLMAN was a pre-Comstock Nevada pioneer, an enterprising leader of miners in Gold Canyon during the 1857-1858 winter, between the deaths of the ill-fated but prophetic Grosh brothers in 1857 and the main silver lode discovery at the Ophir in Virginia City, in June of 1859. He then was engaged in business at Gold Hill for a decade after the discovery, and was early recognized by his fellow pioneers as a reliable witness and as a man of trustworthy character.

His sketch which follows of early mining days in the Comstock and nearby Gold Canyon areas would seem to be a notable document, resurrected as it were from the limbo of forgotten things at this late date, and destined hereafter to rank as one of the chief primary sources on its subject—the real rather than the mythological history of the early Nevada Comstock area.

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Dolman is endorsed by name in J. Wells Kelly's *Second Nevada Directory* of 1863 and in Eliot Lord's later federal publication on *Comstock Mining and Miners*, of 1883, as an informed and accurate witness, at a time when many living contemporaries could have challenged any erroneous statements; and much of his story is paralleled in the basic accounts by "Dan De Quille" (William Wright) and Henry DeGroot, and in the histories of Nevada by Myron Angel and H. H. Bancroft. These together make up our best early sources, even if not all primary accounts, of the Comstock's origins. Moreover, the late Grant H. Smith, the most thorough and accurate recent authority on the Comstock, also accepts Dolman as a qualified and authentic witness. No one man can recollect or objectively record all minor details in complete agreement with versions of all other witnesses, but so far as we can today judge by the parallel corroboration of other records, Mr. Dolman's account must merit the most respectful consideration by all students or readers of Nevada's mining history, a sketch notable for both accuracy and readability. It supplies a missing link as to events between 1857 and 1859, and throws new light upon the most important event in Nevada's history—the Comstock Lode discovery.

William Hickman Dolman was born on a Muskingum County, Ohio, farm on January 5, 1830, of English ancestry transplanted to Pennsylvania before the Revolution, in which...
his forebears fought. His boyhood was spent chiefly in Zanesville where he was schooled in the “academies” of that day. He was a precocious boy, noted from age of six for ability to recite long poems from memory. Deciding against the study of medicine, he left school at seventeen to enter business as a store clerk. In 1847 he left Ohio for St. Louis, taking a steamer from Cincinnati. At Louisville the steamer was boarded by Jessie Benton Fremont, on way to California under escort of the scout Kit Carson, to join her “Pathfinder” husband. The big-eyed youth was surprised that “so quiet and mild a man could be a great Indian fighter”—gentle, low-spoken, and smaller than average in size. “When ten years had passed over my head I knew much better that size and bluster counted only in a drunken brawl or gouge-eye fistfight” on the frontier.

Employed in a St. Louis store from 1847 to 1849, at the outbreak of a cholera epidemic he moved to Brunswick, Missouri, until 1852, meantime suffering chronically the chills and fevers of the malarial “ague” which sent so many emigrants overland aching for California’s sun. Caught also by the gold fever, he started west in late spring of 1852, then aged twenty-two and at the head of his own outfit consisting of a covered wagon, two yoke of oxen, a riding pony and four cows, one giving milk, and taking along two passengers. He was frail from malaria and considered a poor risk for the hard overland journey, but had decided, “I go, live or die.” Indians killed his horse, his wagon-bed he gave for use as a coffin, and his teamster decided to turn back, but despite all vicissitudes he arrived safely at Sacramento over Carson Pass by October 8, with two other Missouri wagons joined early on the trail.4

Lord, Comatock, 33-4; Angel, Nevada, 201, 251-2, 255, 479; Carson City Appeal, March 6, 1920; Oakland Tribune, Oct. 17, 1929; obituaries in Portland Oregonian, Journal, Telegram, Nov. 27-29, 1913, and related items, Portland Library; Oregon vital statistics; Mrs. Lola Childs and others of St. Helens, Oregon; Gold Hill, Carson City and Pioche Episcopal Church Records, thanks to Bishop Wm. F. Lewis; Nevada, Missouri, Oregon, and California Oddfellows Records, thanks to E. C. Mulcahy, Paul Giraudo, and Frank Macbeth; Oregon Gazetteers, 1890-94.

4. For comments on this route see A. E. Hutcheson, “Overland in 1852; the McGuirk Diary,” Pac. Hist. Rev., XIII (Dec., 1944), 426-432 and notes thereto. One of the best accounts of the improved route, as of 1861-5, and other important new light on early Nevada, is found in the papers of John W. North at the Huntington Library.
From 1852 to 1857 he mined and prospected in California, at Diamond Springs, Dead Man's Hollow, Prairie Diggings, and Wall's Diggings. Late in 1853 he bought a claim at Western House at which he and partners cleaned up from $8 to $40 per day until the next spring when the water gave out. In 1855 he mined in Johnson's South Canyon, in 1856 on the American River fifteen miles east of Placerville.

As told hereafter in his memoir, "Before the Comstock," the winter of 1857-8 was spent in Gold Canyon, just below the later Comstock Lode. His company—which included "Big French John" Bishop, "Kentuck" Osborn, locator of the Kentuck mine, V. A. Houseworth, De Quille's blacksmith recorder, and others—built Nevada's first crude arrastra, mined and refined the first quartz and obtained the first bullion, unless the Groshes refined a small amount which is unproved. Silver they saw but some thought it lead, and no report came back from the sample taken to Sacramento by Major Ormsby. The Groshes seem to deserve credit for first identifying silver in the area, but not for locating the Comstock Lode itself.

Dolman himself drew up the first laws for Nevada's first organized mining district, called "Columbia District," which included Virginia City, Gold Hill, Silver City, Flowery and nearby areas. Also he was first recorder, keeping first record book of claims, including one filed on or near the Comstock Lode for "Old Virginia" Finney, the later sale of which is related by De Quille.

After the seeming failure described in the memoir, he and some of his company went to the east fork of the Walker River and prospected there, returning to California by way of Forest City, Marysville, Grass Valley, Jackson and Volcano. In the spring and summer of 1859, silver was struck

North, often maligned by Senator W. S. Stewart, was Nevada Territorial Surveyor and Supreme Court Judge, founder of Minneapolis and of Riverside, a leader in the state constitutional conventions of both Minnesota and Nevada, and as a Minnesota delegate to the 1860 Republican Party Convention was an active worker for Lincoln, who then gave him two Nevada appointments. The North papers concerning Nevada are now being studied by the present editor, for early publication. See also Mary North Shepard, "The Norths Go West" (unpublished manuscript); Smith, Comstock, 28n; Lord, 71.
in the Comstock Lode four or five miles from his old arrastra workings of the 1857-8 winter. He hoped his old claims there would still be valid, and resolved to return there early the next spring. In March of 1860 with Jack Colehower he started over the Sierra for Washoe, and after severe exposures and hardships arrived at Gold Hill. He held a latent fear that his old Johnstown records, in which he recorded the claim for James Finney, might be in conflict with the later locations. He had been in California when the second mining laws were enacted. He found that his old records had been kept out of sight for nearly a year by John S. Childs, probate judge of Carson County by appointment from Utah, with whom he had left them. All of his quartz mine locations near Devil's Gate had been “jumped” and relocated, and he found himself a “nobody” when he returned.

He took up a few town lots in Gold Hill and, the better to hold possession, established a wholesale and retail hay and grain yard and livery barn with a partner, George G. Clark, which did a flourishing business as a miners’ supply center. Soon afterward the sheriff also made him receiver for the “What Cheer House,” a hotel owned by Jake Colburn.5

At the outbreak of the Civil War Mr. Dolman was so crippled by rheumatism brought on by exposures that he had to use two crutches. Failing to get relief from Steamboat Springs hot baths or at Placerville, in the summer of 1863 he went east by stagecoach, able to walk now with aid of a gold quartz-headed cane given him by Nevada’s first Odd Fellows’ Lodge. After medical treatment he visited his parents and his brother, an army officer at the front, but was barred from service himself as an 1863 4-F. He continued on to New York and there took steamer via Panama for California.

On this voyage he met and courted his future wife,

5. Hay was an important commodity on the Comstock, as De Quille often emphasized. See Twain, Roughing It (Hartford, 1872), 296; R. G. Lillard, “Dan De Quille, Comstock Reporter and Humorist,” Pac. Hist. Rev. (Sept., 1944), XIII, 252; Twain, Works, vol. 8 (New York, 1913), II, 6. Price for hay at Virginia City in 1860 was 50c a pound, the same as for coffee, barley was 40c, the same as for bacon; flour was $75 per hundredweight; De Quille, 104. For hay field claims, G. H. Book A, pp. 13, 14.
Christine Caroline Hoerner, who was coming to teach at Copperopolis, California, and journeyed under the care of the Reverend and Mrs. Ozi W. Whitaker. Then Episcopal rector for a group of Nevada towns including Carson City, Gold Hill and Virginia City, Whitaker was later Bishop of Nevada and of Pennsylvania, and was inspiration for the novel *In the Bishop's Carriage* by Miriam Michelson, herself reared on the Comstock with her famous brothers, Albert, the Nobel Prize physicist and Charles, Democratic party publicity head. The bishop was often seen riding at breakneck speed on the fastest horses of the Virginia City pony express line, from parish to parish, his clerical robe billowing out behind.\(^6\)

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6. The Gold Hill Episcopal parish and vestry records give a good picture of church problems in a frontier mining town. The Rev. Franklin Rising, Twain's friend and brother of the local judge, was first rector, from July 8, 1862 until October 18, 1863 when Ozi W. Whitaker arrived. Whitaker resigned, September 2, 1865, to go east. From 1867 to 1870 Whitaker was rector at Virginia City, officiating at Gold Hill afternoons. Dolman served on the vestry with John D. Winters, A. B. Paul, R. S. Day, J. C. Corey and A. W. Hale, among others. Governor Nye and H. M. Yerington were vestrymen of Carson City parish in 1863 when the Dolmans were married there.

The first Episcopal service at Gold Hill in 1862 was held in a theater at rear of a "drinking and gambling saloon." A new owner refusing use of premises, the school house was used, then the I. O. O. F. hall. By December, 1864, a $3,000 church was built, in spite of "business disaster." The interest not paid on $3,500 of the church debt, the building was sold at sheriff's sale to the noteholder, but was redeemed within six months' grace period by $3,071 currency ($2,162 gold value) raised by Whitaker in the East, plus $2,934 raised locally by a "Fair and festival," and a $1,300 rectory was purchased. In 1870 it is lamented that with seats for 150 in the "neat brick church" only a score attend. "We have no Sabbath here and Mammon rules the day." In 1886 the brick church was abandoned and "services held in a building on Main street formerly a gambling room and saloon, purchased and adapted."

In an item entitled "Sunday on the Comstock" the Virginia City Chronicle (quoted in Min. & Sci. Press, Oct. 28, 1876, p. 287) tells of the fun it would be to guide a puritan stranger from Massachusetts through town on Sunday evening, past 130 saloons on C Street, lights glaring and doors wide open to keno games, brass bands inviting to the melodion. Lounging, laughing, swearing crowds are on the street corners, to say nothing of the sights down the hill. "What a chill of horror would they send through the veins of the staid New Englander. Would not his established ideas that the earth was made for the children of the Lord, and that the people of New England are His children, be somewhat confused?"

"Are we in America?" he would exclaim.

"No, we are on the Comstock." Work is going on in the mines, horse racing and dog fighting at the race track, gambling in the saloons, lounging on the streets. Proud of it or regretful, we cannot alter the existing condition of things if we would. "But we can send any New Englander back to the blue laws and bitter Sabbath, with the valuable knowledge that although Boston may be the hub of the universe, the Comstock is a very lively spoke."

Professor William Miller, in his forthcoming study of the Virginia City Theater, will modify existing ideas as to Comstock recreations.
Copperopolis sought elsewhere for a teacher, for on the voyage Miss Hoerner and Mr. Dolman became engaged, and no doubt encouraged by the zealous rector with an eye to gaining an asset for his parish, were married in the rectory at Carson City, November 5, 1863. Mrs. Dolman was a woman of ability and charm, and in every Nevada town where she lived the Episcopal bishop called her his right hand.

In 1868 Dolman and his partner invested their savings, along with some money Mrs. Dolman had inherited, in fitting out a mule train and hauling lumber and other building materials to Treasure Hill, White Pine county, Nevada. Two miles from Hamilton, this place was about 9,000 feet above sea level. The two-story building they built here rented for over $900 a month, but in less than two years sold for only $900. Treasure Hill was a flash-in-the-pan mining town. The mines were very rich near the surface but the lode soon "petered" out, never to be found again. A tunnel was run into the mountain from Hamilton but the ledge could not be found.

During the boom Dolman's family had gone to New York, but when deflation came they returned, and about 1870 a move was made to Pioche, a new and promising mining camp in Lincoln County, Nevada. Here he established a very successful wholesale and retail business which handled large amounts of hay, grain, and other products that the Mormon farmers raised. This business was sold at a large profit and in the spring of 1876 the family moved to Oakland. After a year or so Dolman and his Pioche partner, Boone, established a wholesale and retail grocery in Bodie, California. The family never lived there, remaining in Oakland, and the business was sold when Dolman sensed that Bodie would soon pass the zenith of its prosperity.

In 1880 he went to New York to seek capital for a mining venture and spent part of the year in England and France. After his return, he went to St. Helens, Oregon, about 1881, where he bought a general store, a wharf and other property. He continued to live in St. Helens until a fire of September 14, 1904, which burned most of the town.
He then bought a home on the Heights in Portland where he lived until his death in 1913. He left an estate of moderate value, including 1,100 acres of farm and timber lands in Oregon and Washington.

He always retained his interest in mining, and was given a commemorative diploma for his "valuable services" with the Mining Department of the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition held in Portland in 1905, showing the high regard in which he was held in mining circles even at the age of seventy. At various times he studied the geological structure of the Sacramento valley and came to the conclusion that ages ago when the sea reached to the foothills of the Sierras, streams washing down the hillside carried gold which settled under the silt which now forms the fertile valley lands. He made two attempts, one about 1879 and again about 1906, to sink shafts and prospect for gold under the floor of the valley. Nothing came of these attempts.

In his last years he became much interested in astronomy study and owned his own telescope at his Portland Heights home. His unusually good memory remained to the end, and he could quote long passages from Shakespeare. In the various mining camps he was usually the one who wrote up the hand-written newspaper that went the rounds. This was no doubt an aid to his memory in writing his memoir, along with other autobiographical recollections, toward the end of the century.

Dolman joined the Odd Fellows Lodge at the age of twenty-one at Brunswick in 1851, transferring to Sacramento lodge in 1852, and to the Comstock's Wildey No. 1 lodge in 1862, of which he was Noble Grand in 1863-4. He held the same office in Gold Hill's Parker No. 13 on its institution in 1868, and was also Grand Warden of Nevada grand lodge on its declaration of independence from California in 1867-8. He was baptised an Episcopalian and served as junior warden in the vestry of Gold Hill's St. John Church, almost from its organization in 1862.

At varying times, while continuing his mercantile business, he was county superintendent of schools in Lincoln county, Nevada, 1875-6; treasurer of Columbia county, Ore-
gon, one term; and for a number of years postmaster of St. Helens. His second wife by a marriage in later years was Nancy McBride Morse, of a prominent Oregon family including U. S. Senator George McBride, a brother, and editor Alfred Holman of the Portland Oregonian, San Francisco Argonaut and Bulletin, and Oakland Tribune, a nephew. There were no children by this second marriage.

At his death, which occurred in Portland on November 27, 1913, Mr. Dolman’s age was just short of eighty-four. He was survived by his widow and by all of his four children: Annie Dolman Inskeep, Ph.D.; William Henry Dolman D.D.S.; Percival Dolman, M.D.; and Caroline Dolman (died March 28, 1943). The first three were born in Nevada.

Before the Comstock, 1857-1858

In October, 1852, en route to California with an ox-team and an emigrant train, my way lay through what is now western Nevada and up the Carson river across the mouth of Gold Canyon. There I saw gold mining for the first time. From there we went through Eagle Valley (where Carson City now stands), up through Carson Valley to the first mountain stream that cut deep into the mountain range, called West Carson River, and thence across the range to California by the “Carson Pass”.

In the autumn of 1857—five years later—being within a day’s ride of the Carson Valley country, I crossed the summit to look again on that country; and more especially to examine Gold Canyon for future mining operations.

Forming a favorable opinion of that mining region I returned to California and organized a trading and Mining Company to proceed with goods, tools and supplies to that locality, before the snows would block the mountain roads. Our principal object was to construct a bed rock flume in Gold Canyon for placer gold mining purposes. Two weeks later we started with all our possessions loaded in two wagons drawn by six yoke of cattle. Ours was later called the “Placerville Company”; at the time it was unnamed.

7. See note 4, above.
I furnished most of the money, business, and mercantile experience, all of which were somewhat limited.\(^8\) A. L. Johnson, a carpenter and an active contractor, and John A. Osburn, furnished a lot of goods taken on slow debts. V. A. Houseworth furnished one ox team and G. A. Lashbough furnished another. John Bishop was taken along free of charge by our company he "being an excellent hand to work." He is the "Big French John" of Comstock days.

On the first of November we started bright and early. The day was most lovely, every step was upward and onward. Strange how full of hope we all were, starting up that mountain road, through a forest of giant pines whose foliage often obscured the sun and gave out a pleasant, refreshing, resinous fragrance.

Toward noon the sun shone less brightly, we noticed the sky becoming overcast, and soon we were in a fine misty rain. Every effort was now made to pass over a steep new road before the rain made it too slippery for the oxen to maintain a foothold. Before we had reached the top of the ridge that divides the south fork of the American river from Silver Creek fork, night overtook us. We knew of a woodman's unoccupied cabin some eight miles farther on, in which we could be sheltered for the night, if we could reach it.

The rain that had begun falling so mildly, with scarcely a breath of air, now changed to a terrific howling mountain storm. It was proposed that I should go ahead and, if possible...
possible, light beacon fires to make it safer traveling with the teams in the night. Carrying an axe, and at a double quick run, I pushed forward for that purpose. At an advantageous point I found a large pine tree into which successive fires had burned out a hollow space large enough to have sheltered our whole company, and hewing off some chips, fat with pitch, was ready to light a fire. On looking for my box of matches when ready, horror, they had been left in the wagon.

At short intervals, gusts of wind, fierce as a tornado, followed each other like the waves on a troubled ocean. As each gust went by, for a short interval the monster pines trembled and gave out the faint tinkling sound of myriads of little bells. The sound probably was produced by the action of the wind on the pine leaves. The forest was one weird Aeolian harp, not loud, but sweet beyond description, I had never heard the like before, nor did I ever hear it again after that night.

Mechanically feeling again in my pockets, I found one lone match. Here was a ray of hope; but what were the chances of striking fire with one lone, damp match in such a gale? Fortune favored me though, and soon the pitch pine fire was a blazing success. So intense was the feeling wrought up by this incident that I seldom willfully wasted a match ever after.

For some unknown reason it did not become dark, but remained more like twilight. In a short time the teams came up, and more of the party went on to light other fires as required, and to build a roaring fire in the woodman's cabin.

Before ten o'clock, when we reached the cabin, the storm had spent its fury. The unyoked oxen were munching wild peavine, and we, gathered around a large blazing fire, were baking bread, frying meat and making coffee. None for a moment thought of looking back. One thought only was uppermost with each one, would this storm deposit deep impassable snow before we could cross the summit range? That was easily possible, as eight or nine days' travel were yet ahead of us before we could hope to pass the highest point. Not much was said of this, but an under current of
repressed chagrin was noticeable in strange contrast with
the buoyant start of early morning.

The conversation started on religious subjects and the
Bible as being Holy Writ. One of the party flatly denied his
belief in anything Holy, and when another asked him where
he was raised that he could so express himself, the first quar­
rel in the company began. It, however, was not the last.

During the next ten days it stormed some part of each
day, but we kept pressing forward. Sometimes at night,
without shelter, we cut evergreen boughs, laid them on the
snow and spreading blankets on that, slept the sleep of tired
men. And thus we toiled on and upward day after day,
encountering difficulties and overcoming them, exposing our­selves as men seldom do except in war; laying the foundation
for rheumatism that must yet be paid for in aches and pains. 9
At last we could look down into Carson Valley where the
carpet of grass was now browned by the frosts of autumn.
With worn out teams and much cooled ardor we slowly jour­neyed through the valley, through the little hamlet of Genoa,
arriving at old Johtown in Gold Canyon on a day and date
now forgotten (probably about the middle of November
1857). No rain had fallen yet in the Gold Canyon region,
in fact we had no rain or snow there that winter. 10

During the first evening we were in Johtown, John
Bishop, "Big French John," visited one of the Trading Posts,
got crazy drunk and cleaned out all the Dutchmen in town.
They soon returned in a mob, with "Dutch Nick" Ambrose as
leader, broke in the door, and beat Bishop with clubs and
stones until he fell to the floor. 11 Then Nick kept on pound­

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9. John A. ("Snowshoe") Thompson, the mail and express carrier by ski of the
1850's, was more hardy, more experienced, or more fortunate than most in ability
to withstand winter cold in the Sierras. See De Quille in Overland Monthly (2d
Series), Vol. 8, 419-435; Lord, 21; Angel, 103.

10. Studies by George Hardman, Nevada State Conservationist, and Cruz Ven­strom, based largely on Truckee River run-off and tree growth studies for nearby
areas, find "indications point to near drouth conditions over this area during these
three years, and that the Virginia City area could have had one or more very dry
winters," 1855-1868.

11. "Dutch Nick" Ambrose's tavern was the locale of the goriest murder hoax
ever committed in Nevada by the pen of Mark Twain. R. G. Lillard, "Contemporary
Reaction to 'The Empire City Massacre'," American Literature (Nov., 1944), Vol.
16, No. 3, 198-203; Ivan Benson, Mark Twain's Western Years (Stanford University,
1958), 91-92; Angel, 38.
ing and beating him with his fists until Bishop trumpeted "enough" like a conquered elephant. This battle gave Bishop more notoriety than all the other members of our company ever had. In fact, he is about the only one of us ever referred to by Comstock histories that have come under my notice.12

We occupied a miner's dug-out or cabin temporarily, and four of the party started with the teams to procure lumber at a little saw mill, in Washoe valley.13 They cut and hauled the logs to the mill, helped saw the lumber and in three or four weeks we were sheltered by our own house. There was no water at that time of year for mining purposes, and on being told that water was an uncertain factor

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12. Dolman himself, Osburn, Bishop and Houseworth are all referred to in works by Kelly, Lord, Angel, DeGroot, and De Quille; see notes herein. De Quille, pp. 52-53, states that Bishop (who was still working as a miner at Gold Hill in 1876) built the first Comstock arrastra, which started up a few days before that of Osborn and Winters at the Ophir. Bishop located the Central No. 1 mine, later part of the California mine of the Bonanza firm or "Big Four" (Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien). Gold Hill was discovered by Bishop, Finney, Henderson and Yount; Lord, 35; De Quille, 42. Bishop sold his adjoining Central No. 1 claim to the California company on August 15, 1859 (G. H. Bk. A, p. 38) but in 1876 based a nuisance suit against the Big Bonanza firm on this sale; DeGroot, No. 11, M. & S. Press, Dec. 9, 1876, p. 384. Bishop had claimed 150 feet between "Penrod and Co." (the Ophir) and H. B. Camp's 150 feet. Bishop, Houseworth and Camp filed the "Boomerangus" as partners, G. H. Bk. A; p. 9. Same, p. 11, Bishop, Camp and Rogers filed the Yellow Jacket; same, p. 11, next to it Houseworth filed for himself the Crown Point.

DeGroot (Min. & Sci. Press, No. 7, Oct. 14, 1876, p. 249) states in an item, "Unhappy effects of suddenly acquired wealth on the marital relationship," that Osborn sold his Ophir interest to Donald Davidson and Gen. Allen and died of a fractured limb, compounded by "unrequited attachment unwisely cherished for a young woman," at Silver City in 1864. Since "partial exile is apt to render men all the more susceptible to the tender passion," many Washoe pioneers have "given way to this weakness." Several were "cajole[d] out of their money, and sometimes into hasty and ill-advised wedlock and that not always with women of the most exemplary and deserving kind." Examples listed include McNulty, Hastings, Bacon, and "poor Berry," whose spouse, "the supernumery wife of a Washoe Mormon who had unsealed and set her adrift," robbed Berry and left for Utah.

Mrs. Cowen did the reverse toward Cowen, before becoming Mrs. Sandy Bowers; Mack, 156, 414. Comstock, O' Riley and Plato were others unlucky at romance; De Quille, 77-81, 94; G. Lyman, Saga of the Comstock, 36. Comstock briefly acquired a wife by bill of sale from her husband, but although left locked in a hotel room, she soon deserted him for a handsomer rival, who helped her escape through a window.

O'Riley, unstable mentally, by forged letters was incited to a duel over a lady's hand by Johnston jokers as a hoax. Plato was obliged to marry a lady of ill repute to recover his mine; she long out-lived him to enjoy its income.

13. This was probably the mill built by Mormon Elder, and Judge, Orson Hyde, which gave cause for the famous 1882 curse upon Nevada gentiles; Angel, 40-41; Bancroft, 73, 79-86. A little-known portrait of Hyde is in the Douglas County Court House, presented by Hyde's son, at time of Pony Express celebration in 1930's.
at any time that far east of the Sierra Nevada range, we did not begin work on the proposed bed rock flume, and, in fact, never did build it. Johnson and Osburn kept our company well supplied with wild meat, mostly mountain sheep, so at least we ate well.\textsuperscript{14}

During the winter of 1857-8, Johntown contained besides our company, best known as the "Placerville Company," Ormsby's\textsuperscript{15} store, operated by S. A. Swager; Job's store, kept by H. B. Camp; John Childs' store, kept by Mart M. Gage; one kept by Harris Jacobs and Lal Weil; one by Nicholas Ambrose, "Dutch Nick"; and one saloon by Gray and McBride. The largest of these stores did not have over two or three tons of groceries; some of them less than half a ton. Lyman Jones, wife and girl baby; Will Dover, wife and little boy; Mrs. Cowen, afterwards Mrs. L. Sanford Bowers (wife of the later famous "Sandy Bowers"); and "Dutch Nick" and his wife were the only families in Johnstown that winter. Princess Sallie Winnemucca, her sister Marie, and their brother Natchez, afterward Chief of the Piute tribe of Indians, spent part of the winter there.

Of the miners, these I particularly remember:\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] The rapid killing off of the wild game by the whites, and the abduction to Williams Station of two Indian girls, were the chief causes for the Piute Pyramid Lake Indian War of 1860; De Quille, 29, 124; Lord, 67-71; "Princess" Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins,\textit{Life Among the Piutes} (Boston, 1883), 70; DeGroot, \textit{Min. & Sci. Press}, No. 5, Sept. 2, 1876, p. 160; Kelly, 2d \textit{Rev. Dir.} (1883), 49.
\item[15] For Major Ormsby, see De Quille, 27; Ormsby was agent at Genoa for the Pioneer Stage Company, a founder of Carson City, in the Nevada county now named for him, and was killed by the Indians while leading the whites in 1860 in the first battle of Pyramid Lake; Angel, 104, 161; Bancroft, \textit{Nevada}, 209; Lord, 67-71; Mack, \textit{Nevada}, 178, 241, 304-7, 340.
\item[16] For Job, Angel, 36; De Quille, 27, 30.
\item[18] For Gage, Angel, 31; Bancroft, 71.
\item[20] For Ambrose, see note 11, above.
\item[22] For the three Indians, see Lord, 67; Hopkins,\textit{Life Among the Piutes}, 70.
\item[23] For Comstock, De Quille, 46, 82-4, his own letter at p. 82; Angel, 56; G. H. Book A and Virginia Book A.
\item[24] For Finney, De Quille, 87, who praised his industry between drinks; Kelly, 153.
\end{footnotes}
Henry P. Comstock, an industrious visionary prospector, though little more than half-witted.

James Finney, "Old Virginia," frontier hunter and miner, a man of more than ordinary ability in his class, a buffoon and practical joker; a hard drinker when he could get the liquor, and an indifferent worker at anything.

Peter O'Riley, half-witted and "half-cracked," lazy and stupid.

Joseph Kirby, sober and honest, but indolent.

John Walker, violinist, a Mormon and violent partisan.

Joseph Webb, a Mormon, and a miner, quite well informed for his class; the principal writer for the local

(Gold Hill Records, Book A, lists the claims of most of these men. See Historian, VIII (1946), No. 1, 5-18.)

For Kirby, DeGroot, Min. & Sci. Press, No. 2, July 29, 1876, regarding his hazy claim to the Ophir ground; Angel, 56; Kelly, 153, 306; Smith, 6; G. H. Book A, p. 12, for cedar stump later removed by Stewart during lawsuit.

For Hale (of Hale and Norcross), DeGroot, No. 11, Min. & Sci. Press, Dec. 9, 1876, p. 384, states that he was the only Mormon to secure a Lode claim. He returned to Salt Lake in 1860.


Houseworth is called "the village blacksmith" at Gold Hill by De Quille; see also Gold Hill Book A, 1-30. Ed. C. Morse succeeded him as recorder on June 27, 1859; Houseworth and Osburn filed "Notice of copartnership," Book A, pp. 7-8. Osburn sold him his blacksmith tools and shop.

Corey helped discover Aurora, in Esmeralda county, famous from Twain's Roughing It. Also G. H. Book A, p. 10.

One "Old Frank," a Mexican, was an associate of the Grosh brothers, who named a mine for him; Angel, 52; Lord, 27; Mack, 200.

For Sides and Jessup, DeGroot, Min. & Sci. Press, 1876, No. 13, p. 420. It is likely that O'Riley and McLoughlin first struck the Ophir pay-dirt by jumping the ground during Jessup's funeral. Sides' mine became part of the Consolidated Virginia; Lyman, Saga, 362.

For indictment and release of Sides, see Judge Frank Norcross in Sam Davis, History of Nevada (Reno, 1913), I, 277; Enterprise, June 20, 1875.


The L. D. S. Church Historian at Salt Lake City finds no record of a Bishop O. S. Lyford. (Letter from Joseph Fielding Smith.)

For Vignot, G. H. Book A, p. 25, 29; at p. 13, his claim for a hay field; also see Angel, 571; Bancroft, 109. G. H. Book A, p. 14, A. Cowen also filed a hay field.

For Galphin, Angel, 51; Mrs. Ellis states that Galpin (sic) was a Grosh partner.

For Williams, De Quille, 30; DeGroot, in Min. & Sci. Press, Sept. 2, 1876, p. 160; Lord, 67; Hopkins, Life Among the Piutes, 70.

For Parker, Gold Hill Book A, original, clipping pasted inside cover; Hutcheson, Historian, VIII, No. 1, 11-14; Parker was one of the five delegates to the abortive Genoa constitutional convention of July 18, 1859; Angel, 59; Bancroft, 74.

For Knight, Angel 60; Lord, 36; Gold Hill Book A, where with Bowers, Plato and Rogers he made several filings of claim locations.
newspaper (all in manuscript), called the *Gold Canyon Switch*.

Brailey, who with Webb, often sang ballads in duet very sweetly.

“Dutch John” Smith the camp blacksmith, and something of a local character.

James Corey, poor, modest and proud, afterward becoming well to do,

“Dutch” Frank, full name unknown,

Ben Mass, who, with “Dutch” Frank, worked about the only Long Tom in the canyon,

Wm. Sides, who eighteen months afterward stabbed to death one John Jessup at Gold Hill,

John Berry, “Uncle Jack Berry,” a great lover of the “ardent,”

O. S. Lyford, once a merchant in Missouri, and afterward said to have been raised to a bishopric by Brigham Young (the latter is only hearsay),

John Vignot, once a French soldier in Algiers, and known as “Little French John,”

Captain Chapman, who was with the troops at Santa Fe during the Mexican War, a large man deficient in courage and in much that goes to make up a man,

“Dutch” Baker, no other name known, a hard drinker and of little force,

Wm. B. Galphin, called “Cap,” who served in the South Carolina Palmetto Regiment during the Mexican War, of fair ability, sober, honest, manly, a man that one could tie to,

Joseph Bretts, a German, as reliable as Galphin,

Wm. Williams, “Cherokee Bill,” a dangerous man without one spark of honesty or real manhood,

Henry Fisher, a German, an all-around good, reliable man.

Captain A. A. Parker, Placer mining recorder, a man of more than ordinary frontier education and intelligence, had lived in the canyon five or six years but did not combine the elements of success,

Among others there was Wm. Knight, Georgia miner,
who when crossing the plains had remained on eastern slope of the Sierra (he has a story to be told later),

Joseph Sharp, young, honest, truthful and bubbling over with real manhood, who became rich, and was poor the last I heard of him, and ten or fifteen more men, whose faces are pictured on my memory, but whose names forgotten. These all spent that winter in Johntown and in the Canyon near by.

Three or four weeks after our arrival, Henry, (name forgotten) a "bad man," quarrelled with "Dutch Nick" and raised his double-barreled shot gun intending to kill Nick, but in his excited state (for even in that lawless country, among many desperadoes the taking of human life was a serious and exciting matter), he pulled on the trigger not set, and Nick's wife caught Nick by the arm and pulled him into the cabin. Immediately Johntown became too small to hold two such determined men whose blood was up, for Nick was a brave and aggressive man always ready for a fight against any odds. We all felt that a tragedy was imminent. Some of us tried to quiet the men. I had met Henry, in El Dorado county, California, the year before, and as he had always treated me kindly, he presumed somewhat on my friendship, so I tried to persuade him to leave the Canyon for the present at least. But he kept his gun ever ready for an encounter. Nick was, for a wonder, without fire arms in his house and Henry intercepted any one that attempted to take Nick a gun. Nick sent out a proposition that Henry should lay down his gun, and then they would fight rough and tumble until one or the other was dead, and none be allowed to interfere. Henry declined this kind of combat, and Nick, blockaded as he was, in his own house, began to rage, and hurled one insulting epithet after another at Henry (through the door slightly ajar, or again through some open crack in the loose stone wall of his house). All this maddened Henry the more, and after sunset one night, before it became truly dark, just as Nick opened the door an inch or two, Henry fired at close range through the door. The load of shot made a round hole an inch or more in diameter in the door, and then, more or less, buried itself in Nick's thigh. Nick fell with a cry of
“murder” that rang out over Johntown, deadly and chill. A score or more of us men rushed up to learn the fate of Nick. The groans of Nick, the screams of his wife, and the eager questions of men—“Where are you hit Nick?” came to me just outside of the door awaiting reports of the result.

Henry came nearer to look in over my shoulder. I turned and said, “Did you intend to kill him?”

With a quiet sinister smile he replied, “No, I only aimed to shoot his leg off.”

A friend mounted one of Nick’s horses to go for Doctor Daggett, thirty-two miles away.17 Early next morning the Doctor arrived and on examining the wound found the shot had stopped just before reaching the thigh bone. Nick recovered and founded Empire City at the bend of the Carson river, four miles from Carson City. Empire City sounds well, but the old settlers always called it “Dutch Nick’s.”

Henry gave up his gun and asked to be tried at once by the men in the canyon. Capt. A. A. Parker volunteered to prosecute the case. A jury was selected, each of whom was pledged to render a just verdict according to the facts. And we, who were not on the jury, to a man pledged ourselves to abide by the verdict and execute the jury’s mandate. Henry pleaded his own case showing a good deal of provocation as an excuse. Parker made his plea for a heavy sentence. I passed in a paper requesting a written verdict, that we others might carry it out. The verdict read something like this:

“That by-gones should be by-gones. That either party attempting to renew the quarrel should be banished from the Canyon as an outlaw and might be dealt with in a similar manner by the entire community.”

This last meant death on sight. That ended the matter. Just before Nick got well, Henry left, and I do not remember ever seeing or hearing of him thereafter.18

To show conditions as they were in this frontier country,—I will now give the story of “a desperate border

17. At Daggett’s Canyon, Carson Valley; maps at Huntington Library and Nevada Historical Society; Hopkins, op. cit., 58; Bancroft, 72-3; Angel, 39.
18. Compare O’Riley’s duel in De Quille, 94.
encounter” that occurred some six months before at the mouth of Gold Canyon (near what is now the town of Dayton), as related to me by several of the participants.19

After the passes had become open for travel in the early summer of 1857, a California negro, riding a mule, crossed over into Carson Valley journeying eastward. He seemed bent on forcing a quarrel with every man he met, and had several fights with different ones on his way down through the valley. Among others, he fought and beat Peter O’Riley, the big Irishman, who is often mentioned in the Comstock Lode Discovery. In fact, he licked almost every man he tackled except Jim Corey. Jim, active as a cat, brave as the bravest, outgeneraled the negro, tripped him up and before the negro could rise gave him a merited thrashing. This all took place in a very brief space of time, considering the ground gone over. On rode the negro, a terrible outlaw, a wild maniac or bordering on that condition, he traveled faster than the surprise and terror he created, could go. It is an open country and probably the negro did not keep on the old emigrant road half the time.

John Childs, owner of a trading post, operated it at the mouth of Gold Canyon, with his clerk, Mart M. Gage. A man rode up to the trading post, dismounted, went in and

19. Compare 1855 case of Thacker, a Negro; Bancroft, 77; Judge F. Norcross in Davis, Nevada, I, 274; Angel, 384.

Dr. Effie Mack, p. 181, refers to “the influx of a heterogeneous horde of transient irresponsibles” in 1859-60.

De Quille, p. 101, states that from California “with the miners and capitalists also came gamblers of both high and low degree, roughs, robbers, thieves and adventurers of all kinds, colors and nationalities.” Many of the less desirable element were fleeing for refuge from California sheriff or vigilantes in a territory where law and order was as yet unrecognized, and “Old Virginy” himself is thought to have changed his name from Fennimore to Finney to escape legal penalties for some act of violence beyond the Sierras. Some “bad men” perhaps founded Nevada family trees, some were hanged on trees, or shot or knifed, many drifted on to newer mining areas. G. W. Read, after a dozen years in California, wrote from Austin, Nevada, November 29, 1863: “No church or place of innocent amusement here. The society here is perhaps the most loose and rough that was ever collected at any one point, since Noah’s time. It averages from one to three men every day shot. The most reckless and wicked men I have ever come in contact with, but I find plenty of good, honest and pleasant men.” G. W. Read, A Pioneer of 1850 (Boston, 1927), p. 154. See also Gov. Colcord in Sam Davis, History of Nevada (2 vols., Reno, 1913), I, 236-8; Davis, ibid., I, 242; Judge F. Norcross in ibid., I, 277; Smith, 35; Angel and Lord, passim; Tom Fitch, in Harpers, p. 321, Vol. 31.
inquired if a negro riding a mule, had passed by there. They replied "No, none had been seen."

He then stated that a negro had stolen a mule from him, and that he had heard of him several places in Carson Valley, and that he was going eastward. The Californian, on looking out of the door, espied the negro coming down the road toward the Post and immediately went behind the door and covered himself with a blanket that lay convenient. Five or six men were at the Post, among them Henry P. Comstock and Gage. The negro did not halt at the Post, but continued on for one or two hundred paces, and crossed the Carson river apparently to stop and let his mule graze.

On being told that the negro had gone by, the Californian got up and asked the men if they would assist him to arrest the negro and get his mule. They all agreed to do so, and, closing the store, all started. Gage rode his own mule intending to ford the river, and the others, all armed, went on foot to the river bank. The negro was told to come back. He hurled back defiance. Then he was told that he must surrender or take the consequences. He dared and defied all of them. Then Gage crossed the river on his mule, and dismounting, made a shelter (breastwork) of his mule on the negro's flank and drew his revolver ready to fire. By that time the negro was in a towering rage and making the air blue with howling, blasphemous profanity, calling them all the vile names known to the frontier vocabulary.

The negro kept pointing his musket first at one, then at another, but did not fire. The men from the trading post began to feel that they had no ordinary mortal to contend with, and they all began firing at the negro. He seemed able to dodge every bullet by his active movements. The negro kept gradually making a flank movement on Gage, who had a Colts revolver. Every time Gage held his revolver over the mule's back to fire, the percussion-caps which unfortunately were too large for the nipples, would drop off; and thus one after another he lost all six of the caps off the revolver. By this time the negro had come close enough to charge on him, which he did, and actually captured Gage's mule and mounted him. Gage, without taking time to find the ford,
jumped into the icy cold mountain water and swam to the other side. The negro was sole master of the field. But what he really wanted was not a one-sided fight, but a fresh riding mule in place of the jaded worn-out one he had stolen in California.

The negro started down the river bottom, but soon ascertained that he had made a poor exchange of mules. Gage's mule, a worn-out crowbait, couldn't travel at all. The crowd went back to the post discussing the affair, each one telling what he did, what he would have done, "if, and if," when to the surprise of all, here came the negro back towards the post, musket at "ready," and not a hundred steps away. They all ran in or behind the house to take shelter. Those who had loaded their weapons opened fire on the negro and he wheeled, jumped and gyrated as the bullets whistled by him, and soon as the fire slackened started toward them again yelling at the top of his voice: "Oh, you cowardly white-livered hounds, I'll get some of you. You've got to fight and some of you to die. I'll put this musket loaded to the muzzle to good use—you die, you die, you die!"

By this time more of the men had loaded their rifles and revolvers and again opened fire on the negro who retreated a little still wildly cavorting on the mule, and yelling. Comstock rested his rifle on the corner of the house and fired. All knew that the negro was hit by Comstock's bullet. About this time a Piute Indian, taking in the situation, crept through the sagebrush and shot an arrow into the negro's body. This stopped his gyrating but not his blasphemous tongue—"Oh, I'll get some of you white-livered hounds. Come on, come on you cowards, come and meet death and destruction."

By this time every actor in this tragedy was excited to an intense degree, some of them began advancing on the negro, others said don't go near to that monster while he yet breathes. One of the party felt so worked up that he would not be restrained, but advanced, revolver in hand, shooting at the negro all the time. The negro fell to earth, but when this man came within a few steps of him, the negro, with a
last dying effort, raised his musket and sent the charge full into his opponent's breast.

The negro fell dead in the dust and the man he had shot fell to the ground. Some of the party made sure that the negro would not rise again, others picked up this man to carry him to the post. His only words were—"Boys, what is coming up in my throat?" A clot of blood, a gurgle and his light went out forever. He was young, strong, brave and the pride of the Canyon, and rough frontiersmen wept at his sad taking off, and grieved to think that they knew not to whom and where to send tidings to his friends that their son or brother would sleep, lost forever to them, in the wild scented sage flat of the American Desert.

No one seemed to recollect what part, if any, the Californian had taken in the fight for his mule. As soon as he realized that this white man was killed, he mounted his horse to return from whence he came. That was viewed as an unfeeling outrage, and Gage, cocked revolver in hand, commanded him to halt and dismount, and addressed him thus: "You came here and requested us to assist you in arresting the most desperate man ever known. You were afraid of your own life even to be seen by this negro. In this service our best friend here lies dead awaiting burial and we have not the means to decently inter him, and you even hope to shirk your assistance for the burial of the dead who died on your behalf."

The Californian replied, "Men I cannot blame you, I would give everything I have on earth to call back the life of that brave, noble young man. All I have with me is one hundred dollars. Here it is, take it and give him the nearest a Christian burial that you can. I can do no more."

They accepted the money and faithfully carried out the request. To the parents, brothers, sisters, and friends of this young frontiersman, whether or not he went to swell the large list of "never-heard-of after," or not, is to me unknown.

"Old Virginia," (James Finney) some months previous, had discovered placer gold at the head of Six Mile Canyon up near the foot of the range of mountains that divides the
waters of Carson and Truckee rivers. Six Mile, like Gold Canyon, in which our company lived, flows into the Carson. They head within a mile of each other at the base of Mount Davidson, as afterward named. Six Mile drains the north half of the now famous Comstock lode; Gold Canyon the south half. The distance from old Johntown to the head of Six Mile is some five miles.

During the summer or early autumn of 1857, Joseph Colwell, Francis Board and two others, names forgotten, in company with "Old Virginia" and "Many" (Emanuel) Penrod, known as the "California Company," began mining with rockers (the old miner's cradle) at the head of Six Mile, making good wages. Much of the gold still adhered to small pieces of quartz.

The water used in the rockers was very limited. After being used by one rocker it was allowed to run into holes, settle, and be used by the next rocker below until it was too muddy to be used again. The auriferous earth overlaid the bed rock in depth some three to six feet. The workings were a few hundred feet down hill from the Comstock lode as afterwards discovered and named the "Ophir."

I will now relate the first discovery and workings of quartz, as personally known to me, an actual worker and participant therein. [First, that is, in Nevada.]

First let me state that I did not know the Grosh Brothers, the so-called "Comstock Pioneers." Both were dead before I went there. One was then buried in Gold Canyon, the other in California. I do not wish to deprive these unfortunate brothers of any credit to which they may be entitled. Capt. W. B. Galphin was, so he informed me, a mining partner of theirs, and cabined with them part of the time while they were in that country. He was also one of the mining partners of our company, which company built...
the first arastra and did the first quartz mining east of the Sierras, and obtained, so far as I know, the first silver bullion produced in the United States. What the Grosh Brothers said and did while in Nevada will be stated farther on and just as related by Mr. Galphin.

As before stated, the winter of '57-8 was a dry winter. The members of our company were restless and constantly chafing for want of active, prosperous employment. How to mend matters was an everyday discussion not void of recriminations. Against my extreme protest, our small stock of merchandise had been placed on sale before the other miners had begun to make the wherewithal with which to purchase. Most sales were on credit and the bills were never collected. At that time I had made but slight examination of the heads of the Canyons. I was the salesman, of our goods, and gave close attention to our trading post.

Hearing good reports of quartz near the Devil's Gate, I prevailed on Houseworth and Lashbaugh to go up there and examine some of the lodes. They did so, and returned with a few pounds of rotten quartz. On examination I found it showed some fine gold, plain to the naked eye. This little discovery excited us more than I can describe. Old miners understand the depths of despair and the bounding joy of a "strike," and they only, in its intensity.

I recall how I lay awake much of the night, sometimes listening to the mournful, quivering, wailing cry of the night bird of the Great Basin, he who has heard it in loneliness, can never forget it. But it produced no sadness in my heart then. We were even then, though we knew it not, on the trail of that stupendous deposit of silver and gold, the Great Comstock Lode. Hundreds of millions of royal metal lay between us and the barren range of high hills to the north, where the Coyote, Mountain Sheep, Deer and Antelope were game for the hunter any day.

The next morning when the rising sun reddened the hills—Houseworth, Lashbaugh and I, with pick and shovel and pan, started up Gold Canyon to prospect the gold bearing quartz. On nearing the Devil's Gate we saw Joseph Bretts

23. Devil's Gate is a narrow place in lower Gold Canyon, near Silver City.
and Capt. Galphin coming down the hill on the east side of the Canyon, walking fast and seeming somewhat excited. On meeting us Bretts said, "See what we have found."

He opened a little paper and showed us perhaps half a teaspoon full of fine gold and told us that it was taken from a pan of rotten quartz from the croppings near the top of the hill.

"Had they staked off a claim?"
"No."
"Would they take our company in as partners, and we all prepare to work it?"
"Yes."

We all returned to Johntown and discussed the discovery. Major Wm. M. Ormsby, then the most prosperous and energetic man on the eastern slope of the Sierra, hearing of the find, requested a share in the location, and offered to furnish horses, mules and feed for working the arastra that we were proposing to construct without delay. We agreed thereto and did as we promised. The Major, however, never carried out any part of his verbal promise.

I drove down a stake on the croppings, and put up a notice of location thereon. This, I have no doubt, was the first notice claiming quartz lodes made east of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and for that reason is quoted herein from memory. It read like this:

"We the undersigned claim nine claims of six hundred feet each on this Pioneer quartz lead, running east from this stake and notice thirty six hundred feet, and west eighteen hundred feet, with all the dips and spurs and angles. Gold Canyon, Utah December — 1857.

Joseph Bretts
Wm. B. Galphin
A. L. Johnson
J. A. Osburn
V. A. Houseworth
G. A. Lashbaugh
John Bishop
Wm. M. Ormsby
Wm. H. Dolman."
We at once began the construction of an arastra. As this is perhaps the rudest effective mode of pulverizing quartz, thereby freeing the metal from the quartz matrix, a brief description of it may be of interest.

An excavation, circular in form, and one and a half feet deep and some ten feet in diameter, was first made. That was paved with large stones, leaving a surface as nearly level as practicable. A round post was set in the center of this excavation, then flat rocks were set up all around the rim, which when finished caused it to look like a miniature ring of a circus. Sweeps, like those for grinding clay, were mortised into the center post, and to those sweeps large drag rocks were attached. Framed timbers properly anchored at the rim, kept the top of the center post in position. A long sweep was then attached to the top of the center post. Horses hitched to the outer end of the top sweep walked round and round in a circle. The quartz was pulverized between the rock bed and the drag rocks. Two animals, driven by one experienced worker could crush about one ton of rock in a day. Quartz reduction was new to all of us. Instead of starting with a charge of a few hundred pounds, as we should have, we put about three wagon loads in the arastra. The result was that the drag rocks never came in contact with the rock bed. In the multiplicity of council there was failure.

Noticing a large amount (relatively) of pyrites of iron in the quartz, I put in quite a bit of salt, thinking it might rust the iron and free the gold. Several times we raked out the coarser pieces of quartz, and put them in a log fire. Unwittingly, we here began the "patio" process of working silver ores. In this way we obtained some silver from the sulphurate that would not have been reduced without salt and heat.24

With a mule and horse and a limited quantity of provender, we kept up this attempt at reduction some three weeks, then turned out the animals to recruit on the dry

24. The Arrastra method is described in Angel, 588; also in Lord, De Quille, and in Shinn, Story of the Mine (N. Y., 1896). Arrastra and patio were terms and processes long used in Spanish America. Dolman's party was the first to use these processes in Nevada, since earlier mining was gold placering. The Grosh processes are unknown, although De Quille implies they owned assaying or reducing equipment using heat; pp. 33-55.
bunch grass, most excellent feed it was. Then with a miner's cradle we rocked out the partly pulverized batch of quartz. I was an experienced miner in fine placer gold, and did the "cleaning up." We had been unsparing in using quicksilver, probably thirty or forty pounds had been put in the arastra first and last.

As the "clean-up" progressed I became more and more astonished at the show of metal in the quicksilver. I ventured the opinion that the prospects did not show any such quantity of gold as that indicated by the quicksilver. Jeers and hot words were bandied back and forth. I kept repeating, "Boys there is something else beside gold in this quicksilver."

The retort came back hot, "Now that you found it you are too much of a bear to believe it."

I worked away carefully and cleaned up all that was put in the rocker. After the wash-up I found the quicksilver about the consistency of soft wheaten batter made ready for baking hot cakes. Instead of the amalgam settling to the bottom of the pan, it permeated the entire mass. Then I ventured the quip, "If this is gold, our clean-up will be a thousand dollars."

We poured the mass into a buckskin, and by gentle squeezing, the pure quicksilver strained through. The mass within the buckskin became smaller and smaller. After no more quicksilver could be squeezed out I looked at the amalgam carefully and ventured that the value would not be over four hundred dollars. We all went down to Johntown, and I re-tested the amalgam. That was done by placing the amalgam in a frying pan and agitating it over fire within a stove, using care that the fumes of the quicksilver should not be inhaled. Much more time was occupied in this re-testing than I had experienced with any placer gold amalgam heretofore. At last it was pronounced "done" and before it was yet cooled, so eager were we to ascertain the result of our labors, we put it in the gold scales, and found the weight to be only about six ounces. That meager result acted much like a cold bath on our company.

We all, as gold miners, had experienced disappoint-
ments, and who that has hunted for gold has not; but this "come-down" took about all the manly courage out of us. Little was said. Each one seemed to have a faraway look, was perhaps thinking of some cherished maiden back in the States, who, for the past month, had, next to gold, been uppermost in the mind, and of the handsome presents he would buy for her, and the house he would build for "her"; and of his father and mother, brothers and sisters, how happy he would make them with gold, ready coined, and of the dear little sister, in short dresses when he left, who was now a young woman and had written him a letter so kind and tender that it dimmed his eyes each time he read it over. She had requested that he bring her a gold watch when he came back from California. Yes, he meant to do so, and also to purchase a coveted piece of land for his parents, and:—Here he was wrecked again, by sad disappointment. He would just like to kick that pitiful contemptible lump of amalgam so high that it would never come down.

In the far off ridges of California and the other mining states, men of three score and four score years, grizzled, whitened locks, bent and rheumatic bodies, are prospecting, mining, and still thinking of when they left home fifty years ago, it only seems a little while ago; of the lovely maiden he proposed to return for and claim his bride (she is several times a grandmother now), of clasping his fond mother to his breast (oh, she and father, together with most of the family have been laid to rest many a year). But it is all an unfaded picture photographed on his mind.

This short diversion on the disappointments of the gold seekers may seem overdrawn. A history of most all miners' lives would be incomplete without it. As to being overdrawn, I have merely scratched the surface. The sorely, deeply disappointed wrecks of men in the gold fields, are fast disappearing, and their inward life may never be written.

"What was it that promised so much and gave so little result in the quicksilver?" was the frequent question in our company that remained without satisfactory answer.

"Perhaps silver," said Capt. Galphin.25

25. It should be recalled that Galphin had been a partner of the Groshes.
“Might be lead,” said another.

No assayer was then established within the Great Basin to whom we could put the question.

This re-tested mass was given to Major Ormsby to be sent to Sacramento for assay. Never one dollar or any written report was returned to the company. If any member of the company, other than Major Ormsby, received any return from him, I do not know of it, and never heard that such was the case. Ormsby told me that its value was something over forty-three dollars, and that it contained gold, silver, copper and lead. I personally believe that the last two metals were not in it. From knowledge of later workings, it probably must have contained about:

2 ounces gold and equal in round numbers to
two $20 gold pieces $40.00
4 ounces silver equal to four silver dollars 4.00

You will understand that the silver bulk was double the bulk of the gold, and, the mass instead of being yellow, was almost white.

Capt. Galphin told me that his former partners, Allen and Hosea Grosh, had possessed a blow-pipe and some crucibles, and that they had devoted a good deal of time in making tests for silver. It would seem that the brothers, in the course of their education, had studied metallurgy, but had had little of any practical experience therein. They thought that they found evidence of silver, but were never quite certain that such was the case.

No man or company of men can be named as the only and first discoverers of the Comstock lode. Our company certainly worked the first quartz and obtained the first bullion. In the light of later years, we were ignorant of silver mining, of “chlorides” and “sulphurets,” but who knew any more than we did about it? Just as well say that the farmers of a hundred years ago were too ignorant to use a McCormick Reaper.

Gold being a known metal came into notoriety when Marshall picked up his first nugget. Not so with silver. It was not found in the condition of metal. It came to be known
by slow stages. Now one can look back and say, "Why did we not have sense enough to know. . . .?" That all sounds very plausible, but it is only by the light of subsequent practical work that we know how to work these same silver ores.

Galphin was a man of few words and seldom volunteered information unsolicited. Many a time when tramping over the hills with him, I would again refer to this question of silver. Silver deposits were then unknown in the United States. We had everything yet to learn about it. If Galphin had learned anything from the Groshes, I wanted to acquire the knowledge. Even if they thought possibly they had found evidence of silver, where was the deposit located from which they obtained the ore? That raises the question whether or not they worked or located any part of what was soon after known as the Comstock lode. Galphin pointed out the place to me but did not accompany me to it. These quartz croppings were nearly one and one-half miles westerly from the Devils Gate, where the Pioneer lode was located. The wagon road from Virginia to Carson City, after passing through American Flat and over the Divide, and down the grade one quarter to one-half a mile, passed to the eastward of these croppings some hundreds of yards.

I found some little work had been done on the quartz, but saw no evidence of silver. The fact is, I would not have known silver in any other form than metal, even if it had lain there rich as the Bonanzas. It was what miners called a "blanket deposit," and not very extensive. I did not make a second visit to it. I am not certain that this lode was ever re-located, but I suppose it was claimed at sometime during the three great Comstock booms.

Comstock historians of later years have expressed a good deal of half sympathy and half contempt for all the pre-Comstock miners, except the Grosh Brothers, because they did not know enough to go up and locate the mighty deposits of silver. I might retort, "Why did not you do it?"

If you answer that you were not out of the cradle then,
or you were not there, I will answer, "And had you been there, you could not have seen into the ground unless there was a hole in it."

Out of the tens of thousands of holes there now very few struck paying silver deposits. I would as soon have tackled Mt. Davidson as those monster croppings located for Old Virginia, to find gold. Silver was then an unknown factor, and cannot be considered in the light of later manipulations.

I will now take up the thread of history where it was left off the evening we re-tested the clean-up.

The effects of keen disappointment had worn off by morning, and we started to the arastra, more to show that we had not met with any disappointment, than with any fixed purpose of future working. However, there was no heart in the work, so we took long rests at noontime, and before many days we "nooned" most of the day, or prospected elsewhere.

Feeling the necessity of having some quartz mining laws governing locations, a preliminary meeting was called at which I was appointed a committee of one to draft laws and define boundaries for the district. In the performance of this work I had no older laws or regulations to refer to, and I had never before made a quartz lode location, nor had I ever examined or even seen a record of quartz mines. There was not even a blank book in Johntown that could be utilized for the laws and proposed records. On the day named in the notices to pass on these laws, ratify or reject, some twenty or more miners met at our trading post.

The laws as submitted were adopted, and I was elected Recorder of Quartz Mines in "Columbia District," which included within its boundaries all of what was later known as Virginia, Gold Hill, Flowery, Silver City, and some other outlying districts. A few quires of letter paper sewn together was the Book of Laws and Records. This was undoubtedly the first code of Quartz Mining Laws and Records made and declared east of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.27

The Pioneer claim where we worked with the arastra,

was the first claim recorded. Some four or six other little leads were recorded within half a mile of the Devils Gate. Only one claim was recorded on thecroppings of the "Comstock" as later named.

Early in March, 1858, Lyman Jones proposed that we go up to Joe Colwell's Camp in Six Mile, and look over the diggins. Arriving there we found all of the Colwell company at work except "Old Virginia." Two or three Indian "wicki-ups" were on the bank near the ravine that was being mined. In one of these I found "Virginia" with what had been a bottle of whiskey, only part of which was left. He had a long doleful story to tell me of how his Partners had swindled him out of his claim. I will relate it near as remembered, in his own words, leaving out the "damns."

"I discovered these diggins here in Six Mile, and I took in "Many" Penrod and Colwell and Board and all that crowd, and never charged them a cent. Just as quick as they took out good pay they got up a scheme to throw me overboard. They staked off the claims and numbered them from one to six and wrote these numbers on slips of paper and put them in a hat, and said I must draw out a number, as they would, and each man would own the claim so drawn. And (blank, Blank 'em) they fixed the thing up so that I drew the claim farthest down the ravine, and there is no pay in it, and if there was, the water is all wasted or evaporated before it reaches that claim, so I who discovered the diggins, am thrown out with nothing. I am too old to work much anyway."

And the poor old man took another drink from the bottle, and proceeded to make the air blue with profanity, that we trust may not be a witness against him in the Great Beyond.

It is a remarkable fact that, while Gold Canyon was richest in gold from the mouth up three or five miles, Six Mile Canyon produced very little gold, and that only in fine scales, from a few hundred yards below the Ophir to the mouth.

Joe Colwell had been a gold miner in Georgia, who came in early days to California. He was a man of limited
education, but rare natural ability. He would have been a leader of men anywhere. He was kind, gentlemanly, and a conversationalist that one would never forget. It is possible that through this "trick," if it was all a trick, depriving "Virginia" of his pay ground, he lost a vast fortune for himself. Colwell had remarked to me several times that he thought there was something "big" above where they were working. He left those mines, however, in April and never returned. I now think he feared "Virginia's" rifle. Of all countries known to me, men oftenest, in this one, paid their lives in penalty for an injury. Still angry, "Virginia" said to me, "Go up to the big croppings and stake me off a quartz claim, and I will give you a dollar's worth of dust to pay the record fee the first time I come down to Johnstown."

I insisted that he should stake off the location. He steadily refused to do so, or even so much as rise up and point out where to drive the stake. I then wrote a notice for him, and requested that he give the land a name. He refused to name the lode, or sign the notice. His constantly repeated reply was, "Call it what you please, Colwell and his crowd has cheated me out of my surface ground, and I will leave them out of my claim on the big croppings."

At last, I said, "Well if you won't name the lode, I will immortalize you by calling it the 'Virginia Lode'." From memory I would say the notice read thus—

"I, the undersigned, claim six hundred feet on this Virginia quartz lead, running six hundred feet westward from the big rock nearest the ravine from which the spring runs out. Columbia District, Utah. JAMES FINNEY. March the ____ 1858."

I intended locating a claim for myself on the same lode, and just why I did not do so, is a profound mystery to me even at this day. My name alone on the records would have
been worth more than a million dollars to me, or might in turn have cost me my life. "Old Virginia's" location was the last record on the old Johtown Records, and the only one in that vicinity, all the other locations being not far from the Devils Gate.

In the spring of 1858, after a brief effort to strike pay on the east fork of Carson river, all of our company (except Johnson who had crossed to California on snow shoes), the Colwell company of four men, and twenty or thirty others, struck out for the east fork of Walkers River, some ten miles westward from where Bodie was afterwards built. The diggins there were not very rich, and averaged only two to four dollars per day per man. Dogtown was the name given later to this place. ²⁹

By this time sixty or seventy percent of our trading post stock was gone, and we had no money to show for it. I then tried to place the trading on a cash basis. My partners would sell (give away) anything asked for. They had most of the camp as friends, by playing "liberal Dick" with the stock of goods of which I was principal owner. The fact of my being the prime mover in organizing the company, that now was expecting nothing but loss in the wind-up, was against me. I was a young man of strong convictions and not very prudent in maintaining them on all occasions. By and by remarks were made in which "shooting" was hinted at; that meant something in this wild lawless country.

Two men from the frontier of Arkansas had joined our party in Carson Valley, and went to East Walker with our train. These men were honest, upright and generally inoffensive, but desperate when roused. They seemed to have that sense of justice peculiar to frontier life. To see the weak imposed upon by the strong, made it largely their quarrel, and with them a quarrel meant blood. I had seen both of them tried by circumstances, and only timely interference prevented a tragedy. These men said to me, "I see you are

²⁹. For various "rushes" like that to Walker River about this time, J. S. Hittell, Mining in the Pacific States (San Francisco, 1861), 29-35; U. S. Mineral Resources, 1866, pp. 17-26. Also Angel, 51.
to be swindled out of what you have here, if nothing worse. Stand your ground and we will stay by you.”

I thanked them kindly for their friendship, but told them I had about concluded that the sooner I left the company the better for me at least, and possibly for others.

I had a wagon, that, could I get it back to Carson Valley, might sell for one hundred to one hundred fifty dollars which would give me a stake to reach California again. Some twenty dollars in cash was all the money I had, fifteen dollars of this I paid to one of my friends for the use of three yoke of oxen to haul my wagon and me to the settlements.

How happy I was in starting away, flat broke, so to speak. But I lived, as did those behind me. No one had to answer for a life taken. More than two score years have passed since that day, and now I still think that only my firm course prevented what would have been one of the most fatal tragedies, considering the numbers, even known on the border. Every man carried a revolver, and most of them a rifle or shot gun.

We made fast (oxteam) time to cross the main Walker before the melted snows would raise the river too high to be forded. The Walker must be crossed and recrossed five times from Dogtown to Carson Valley. We succeeded in doing so once and once only—the wagon was left there to rot. We were still more than thirty miles from the nearest house in Carson Valley. By the accident at the crossing my only coat had been torn in shreds and my pantaloons were in much the same condition. That was by all odds the hardest thirty miles I have ever been over. I arrived at Moses Job’s store in Carson Valley, which was being tended by Mr. Pickering, who accepted my last five dollars in payment for a seven dollar pair of pants. Mrs. Job, kind, humane lady that she was, invited me in to partake of a nice warm supper. To this day the kindly sweet face of Mrs. Job is before me in all its loveliness, whenever I recall that

30. Dolman’s memoir was written for his daughter to publish, in about 1900, but was based in part upon contemporary diaries and written records, as well as upon memory; his memory was unusually good.

31. Jacob Job, like Childs earlier, operated a store in Gold Canyon: De Quille, Bancroft, 74.
desolate return to Carson Valley, and, whether good fairies or evil brownies waited on her afterlife, she had one friend who keeps her memory green, on the down grade, when the mile stones of life are counted very fast.

Foot-sore, weary, and without a dollar in the world, a pretty wind-up this was to the buoyant, happy, hopeful start made from Placerville seven months before. In that interval I had tramped over one of the richest treasures of earth, but a few yards under my feet, and knew it not.

Just at this time signal fires could be seen in three or four places. This presaged a pending calamity, and it was no Indian scare.

In the early morning before twilight showed in the east, the tramp of a hundred horses carrying mounted armed men awakened the ranchers of the Valley. A Vigilance Committee had come up out of the earth, as it were. "Range yourselves in line for us or against us," was the half request, half command of a voice that meant every word. It depended much on the circumstances of who one was with, and the first thought of surprise, as to the side on which he lined up. The Vigilantes were outspoken, and their recruits immediately became so as well. Those who looked on the proceeding as being unlawful, also most of the "hard cases," were opposed to Vigilant Committees.

The chief reason for the Committee's action was the murder of a Frenchman, Louis Gardier by name, owner of a large band of cattle, ranging in Honey Lake Valley in northeastern California. Some men from California, assisted by others who lived in Carson Valley, had caused Gardier to be murdered, and the cattle were divided up among them.

Gardier's body was found and dragged out of a deep hole in Susan river, which empties into Honey Lake. One Thorington, called "Lucky Bill," a bold bad man, was said to have managed the affair. His life paid the penalty a week later. A fugitive, named Edwards, who had killed a man named Snelling in California, was apprehended, and also met "Lucky Bill's" fate. 32

32. "Lucky Bill" Thorington was a shrewd but humane, Robin Hood-like
For a time all business was at a stand still in Carson Valley. The Committee held Court at Dick Sides' ranch, ten miles above Genoa, on Clear Creek. Sides and "Lucky Bill" were mortal enemies. The Committee of armed men had organized in Honey Lake Valley, and made the arrests in Carson before report of their coming had reached Carson. Three times the usual number of jurors were sworn to try the prisoners fairly, without prejudice or partiality. The proceedings were much like in an ordinary criminal court, with this difference: The Judges (3) and the Jury (36) believed the prisoners to be guilty and intended that their lives should pay the penalty: so at least, it seemed to me.

Before the trial terminated, I became aware that the Indians, Washoes and Piutes, were much alarmed at seeing such a body of armed men. Traveling in an Indian country under such circumstances, I knew to be very unsafe. As I wished to go to California, I proposed to two men, who intended crossing the mountains over the Truckee route to California, that we had better start before the Vigilantes went back home over part of this road, and we did so. By traveling carefully, and quietly (the latter conduct is most important at such a time), we reached our destination with but one disturbing alarm, to which we apparently, insofar as the Indians were concerned, gave no attention. We traveled along like men, minding our own business, loitered not, nor moved hurriedly. This was in June 1858.

Before starting to California, I left my old Johntown Laws and Records with John Childs, a merchant in trade at Genoa. Several miners had been informed of this. I gambler who progressed from a brush-tent trading post at the eastern base of the Carson Sierra crossing in 1850, to opulence by 1856. Mrs. Hopkins states (p. 58) that "Thornton" had two wives—hence, perhaps, the anti-Mormon color of the lynchers' party, mainly Californians out to reform Nevada. Bancroft, Nevada, 68-85; Bancroft, Popular Tribunals (Works, XXXVI, S. F., 1881), I, 594-620; Angel, 58; Mack, 177; W. Cradlebaugh, "Nevada Biography," MS., 1, and H. Van Sickle, "Utah Desperadoes," MS., 3, both in Bancroft Library, Univ. of California; R. W. Ritchie, Hell-Roarin' Forty-Niners, 215-221; Kelly, 2d Nev. Dir., 1863, 37-41; Sacramento Union, June 17, 22, 25, 1858. The last two, nearest contemporary, agree closely with Dolman's account. John S. Childs was appointed Carson County probate judge by the new non-Mormon Utah governor, Cummings, in 1858, after the Utah War. In the October 30, 1858 Carson County election, though the real Mormons left in 1857 for Salt Lake, the winners were called the "Mormon" party—actually pro-law and order, pro-Childs, anti-vigilantes, and hence pro-Lucky Bill, too late.
have been told that later when it became evident that some-
thing valuable had been struck that should be recorded, some 
man rode in great haste to Genoa to get these records. Be-
fore they could be found the second man, then the third man 
arrived on the same errand. Mr. Childs thought something 
very important was up, and did not produce them at all.33

New mining laws were then adopted for Virginia Dis-

33. For Childs, see Mack, 178, 182, 340; Angel, 51, 64; Bancroft, 74, 84.
34. At first the whole quartz district, including Virginia City, was called Gold 
Hill District. Gold Hill Records, Book A; Hutcheson, "Early Mining Districts." 
Historian, (1946), VIII, No. 1, 5; Lord, 15, 33.
35. For Sides and Jessup, see note 16, above, and note 38, below.

New mining laws were then adopted for Virginia District; a blacksmith and my Placerville company partner 
and Pioneer company partner, V. A. Houseworth, was 
elected second Quartz Mining Recorder, and recorded all 
the claims on the Comstock except the "Old Virginia" claim 
that had been recorded by me. Thus the Placerville com-
pany gave to the silver mines the first and the second code 
of Laws and Recorders.

I did not return again to Gold Canyon until March 1860. 
The Comstock was discovered and located in 1859, as is re-
lated below.

On returning to Nevada in March 1860, I learned that 
John Jessup, whom I had known in Sierra County, Cali-

fornia, in the summer and autumn of 1858, had gone there 
the year before and had a claim on the surface of the Com-
stock and was working on it the day on which Wm. Sides 
stabbed him to death. This was just before the silver strike 
had been made. Seldom has the murder of one poor man 
on the outer border of civilization been followed by such 
marvelous results.35

The entire camp except two men—Peter O'Riley and 
Patrick McLaughlin—formed a Committee of Vigilance and 
started with Sides for the Valley, as they said, to try him 
and hang him. These two men left in Six Mile Canyon were 
not the owners of claims there then. They commenced work 
on other claims to make a little money, and no one was there 
to say, "Nay." The first day they struck the rich croppings 
of the Ophir Chimney and took out over three hundred dol-
lars. They covered up the rich deposit, and with this money they purchased an interest therein.

While the miners were away trades were made, claims were jumped and by the time all returned, some who had obtained a doubtful interest in a doubtful way, drew their guns and ordered their ground set off to them on pain of death. Here was laid the foundation of litigation in which many millions were contended for in the courts. I did not learn who held Jessup’s claim, it might have gone to one, but most likely was parceled out. Jessup had told me what his employment was in Missouri, and where his widowed mother lived. I was probably the only person who had taken enough interest in him to learn these facts.

Jessup was buried in the Canyon in front of the later located Crown Point Mine. Later a wagon road was opened past that grave and still later that wagon road became the main street of Gold Hill.86

Most of the newspaper correspondents of the period made a fling at the barbarous people who could bury a human being in the street. They were ignorant of the facts of the case and put the cart before the horse. In the winter of 1860-61, W. C. Davol, Gold Hill Mining Recorder, John Overman87 of the mine, and I, with the assistance of three or four others, exhumed the body and re-interred it in the present cemetery.

Much later still, in the fall of 1864, a Mr. Greer (followed by a woman who kept in the background) asked me if I knew the place where John Jessup was buried, on making reply that I did, he said, “John’s mother wants to see his grave.”

I then turned to look at the woman, still a dozen yards away, and said, “Are you John Jessup’s mother?”

“Yes.”

86. DeGroot and Camp surveyed the main street of Virginia City and Gold Hill along the supposed line of the lode, except where miners refused to let their shacks be moved; Lord, 63-5. In Virginia City this street later became “A” street, higher uphill than “C” street, the main street after 1862. DeGroot was briefly editor of the Enterprise in 1860-61, and was the first Nevada census marshal in 1861. His scrapbook of clippings is in the Huntington Library. See also Mack, 224-7, 212, 124n.

87. For Overman (and Sparrow) see DeGroot, No. 14, Min. & Sci. Press, 1876, p. 426.
“Did you receive the letter I wrote you in care of the Springfield Republican?”
“Yes.”
“Did you ever answer it?”
“No.”

I looked at the woman in utter amazement, choking back the disgust I felt, and said, “In the state this lawless community was then in, I took my life in my hands when I wrote you of John’s interest on the Comstock, as it would at once create an adverse title, or the entering wedge for one, which in effect was about the same, and you have not made the least acknowledgment of the service or the courtesy. Has the Ophir settled with you for John’s claim?”
“Yes.”
“What did they give you?”
“Thirty thousand dollars.”

This woman acted as though she feared that I might ask her to reimburse me for the postage stamp wasted on the letter sent to her with the information of her son’s death and of probable valuable interests left by him. I told Mr. Greer where to find the grave, that a picket with writing by lead pencil told the story of, “Here reposes ___ ___ ___.” and turning my back to this female, never saw or heard of her after this first and last meeting.

After it was ascertained to a certainty, in the spring and early summer of 1859, that rich silver deposits had been discovered, western Utah and California were at fever heat of excitement.

It was called to mind that a Mexican crossing the mouth of Gold Canyon several years before, when examining float quartz, had said, “You will find rich silver mines back in them hills.”

38. For Jessup, see DeGroot, No. 13, p. 420, Min. & Sci. Press, Dec. 28, 1876, who confirms Dolman’s story as to the murder, moving the grave from the road, and Ophir payment to the mother: also Lyman, Saga, 362; Territorial Enterprise, June 20, 1875. Judge F. Norcross, in Davis, Nevada, I, 277, states that the indictment against Sides, Nevada’s first, was dismissed on motion of prosecutor.

39. Compare De Quille, 39; Lord, 13, 24, 61. Mexicans placered the lower Gold Canyon, and a Mexican, known only as “Old Frank,” may have shared the Grosh secret. Dolman refers here to the Maldonado brothers, early owners of the Mexican Mine; DeGroot in Min. & Sci. Press, No. 8, Aug. 12, 1876, p. 112.
deposits, but they were the first to recognize and profit by the discovery. The best house in Virginia City in the spring of 1860, was occupied by them and they were working ore in the vicinity of the Mexican mine adjoining the Ophir claim on the north.

Then it was remembered that the two brothers, named Grosh, had, a year or two before, prospected for silver, thought they found it; and it is said had found it, had absolutely found the Comstock and that all others were only jumpers.

These were the after thoughts of men not familiar with the earlier history, and who, for a time at least, expected to gobble up the entire Comstock lode.

The Grosh Gold and Silver Mining company was certainly indebted to imagination for much of the evidence on which they based their claim in the lawsuit for possession of the Ophir, Gould and Curry mines, and whether these two companies bought off the Grosh company or not, I cannot say. In any event the Grosh company was certain to have met defeat for lack of evidence that they ever “struck a lick” on the great Comstock croppings. In those barren, stunted sagebrush hills, in these early days, even the dirt scratched out by the Coyote would have attracted attention.

In the early spring of 1858, I had walked over the land afterward located as the Comstock, without noticing that the ground had been disturbed in the least. I do not remember striking a lick with my pick either; that however, is merely negative testimony. To mine, one must excavate rock and earth. How is it possible to do this without making a showing on the surface? Might as well say you spaded your garden or plowed your field without making a mark or disturbing the surface.

40. See references of Grant Smith, a Comstock and San Francisco mining lawyer, to the Grosh Company “blackmail” suit; Smith, Comstock, 70, 31-4. The Gould and Curry was a single company, in the early 1860’s employing at times more men than any other mine, but not long profitable. The Ophir made the fortunes of Senator George Hearst and of Darius Ogden Mills, among others. The Mills-Ogden Reid mansion near the Hudson is called Ophir Hall. Fremont Older, Life of George Hearst, 87 ff.; Chico newspaper clippings, U. of Nevada Library; Virginia Records, Book A, 1-2; G. H. Book A, 17, 23, 26. A. Delano—no doubt “Old Block,” the Grass Valley humorist—filed jointly on the Utah, as did Henry Miller, perhaps the cattle king.
The later comers thought that they could have done so much better had they been in at the discovery, than the Pioneers had done. The facts are: the Pioneers possessed the fair average miner's horse sense, and common school education at least. They had not been born and raised in that desert country. They all came from somewhere and had learned something on the way, and also after they arrived.

They were of a higher average intelligence than were the pioneers who settled the great Mississippi Valley, because they knew as much as they, when they started to California, and in the efforts to get there, and the greater distance traveled over, and in the greater variety of men with whom they came in contact, they took on a better practical education. A more intelligent average army of young men than those who peopled California, never trod the earth. The fact that much of the time one or two manuscript newspapers circulated in the Valley, and in the mines, shows isolation and limited facilities certainly, but not ignorance.

After returning in March 1860, I settled in Gold Hill and lived there eight years. During that spring the old Johntown records came into my possession. I made several certified copies of them, and also left them with the Virginia mining recorder to be copied into his records, which I supposed was done.

Charles H. Fish, afterward in Bonanza times, president of the California mine, was, I think, a deputy recorder at Virginia and probably entered my old records in his District Record Book. I loaned the records to Hon. Wm. F. Anderson of Nevada, and when I asked them back some years later, was told that they were burned in the great Virginia City fire of 1875. So ended in smoke the first mining records of the pre-Comstock days.41

41. But earliest Gold Hill and Virginia district records were preserved (although Smith, who relies on printed sources, did not use them); see Historian, VIII (1945), No. 1, 5-18. Interested parties—mine-owners, their lawyers, or officials—may have put the earlier Dolman records out of the way, lest they cloud mining titles and prove source of litigation. The Virginia City recorder seems never to have recorded them. The M. M. Galge—Kinsey records, perhaps for similar reasons, seem to exist today in private hands; Bancroft, 71; Angel, 31 ff.