

# A PIONEER RECORD

by John E. Jones

I, John E. Jones, was born August 7th, 1822, near Swansea, South Wales. I came to America in the year of 1857. I came to Carson City, Nevada, in 1862; to Round Valley in 1864. This valley, Bishop Creek and a portion of Big Pine to the Big Pine Creek, was then in Mono county; and in the year 1870 it was joined to Inyo County. Since '64 I have been a resident of this valley, of which I intend to give the history to the best of my ability.

When I came here the Indians were poor and destitute of food and clothing. Their general diet was taboose, pine nuts, rabbits, small fish and sometimes deer and mountain sheep from the mountains. Men and women were naked except for breech clouts. In cold weather the women had a kind of robe made from rabbit skins sewed together with sinews. Their papooses, or babes, were carried on their backs under a kind of robe. They had very few horses then, and their weapons were bows and arrows. Few in the valley had guns, and one, called Big Sam, had a blanket. In the summer the mahalas would gather some elderberries; and in the autumn gather acorns. They had to go across the Sierras for them, towards the San Joaquin valley.

Their dwellings were poor. In the summer time they used willow boughs with their ends in the ground and branches laid against them to shade the sun. In the winter they had some kind of a wigwam of willow boughs and thatched all around to the tops, about nine or ten feet in diameter, with one hole about two and a half feet square to go in and out. In the center it was about six or seven feet high, with the sides three feet. When cold they had little fires in the center and all sat or coiled around with their feet to the fire. It was a smokehouse indeed, and when they come out in the morning they were well tanned and stank of sagebrush smoke.

For twenty years I have lived with these Indians and never had any trouble. I do right towards them as near as I know how. I know them and praise them for what they do right, and rebuke them for what they do wrong. They never molest me. I never had a lock and key on anything on my premises. My store room is thirty yards from the house, with most of the provisions we need in it, such as bacon, butter, cheese, sugar, eggs, etc., and never had a lock on it. The Indians around us know of it and very often come in to buy things. Considering their ignorance and poverty they are far better than I expected in honesty. I know they do wrong, are treacherous and revengeful but, to my knowledge, the cause of it is with the whites. The whites give them whiskey and make them drunk and do other wrong things to them, causing destruction to their tribes, something the Indians knew nothing about till the whites came among them.

In March, '65, I started the second time from Carson Valley, with three yoke of oxen and wagon loaded with seed grain of various kinds; also agricultural implements, cooking utensils and some food. This spring was uncommonly wet from so much rain, so that travel was tedious and slow. When I came to the Five-Mile House, the other side of Aurora, we found the road through the canyon all washed away so that we had to make a new road and were a week traveling five miles to Aurora. When we reached there in great fatigue we had to pay \$25 for a little hay to feed our oxen that night. Then we had to unload and store away any amount of tools, stoves, etc. We put the stuff in a barn and never saw any of it afterwards. We did this because of 3½ feet of snow we had to travel through the next day. This indeed was a great struggle but nevertheless we made it, at the expense of straining to death in exertion, one of my best oxen.

When I came to this place I only had five oxen and no more than half the load I started with. After about six weeks on the road and traveling about 200 miles.

It was now time to plow, but grass was late this year and what cattle I had were not very strong, and not enough, because I had heavy sod to plow. Before commencing, the next best ox died, and in a few days after another one was stolen and left me with but three oxen. It looked rather dark to get the crop in but with firmness and perseverance we managed to borrow and beg a few yokes of cattle to plow about 4½ acres of land. Here I sowed my wheat, the first in the valley. At this time there were about 5000 head of cattle and horses here, and on the 16th of June the stock pawed, hooked and tramped the ground until there was not a spear of grain to be seen. Some of the men told me then it was no use for me to try to raise grain where there were so many cattle on their old range. I told them I would, or die on the spot. Then I fixed some willow boughs with their ends in the ground and an old wagon sheet over them for shelter, and there I watched with one eye open and the other shut night and day, driving and keeping the stock away till the crop ripened. At this time, remember, no flour in the country, and I was without bread for three months. All my food was taboose, pine nuts and occasionally some beef; but I felt well with great anticipation that it would all come out right. One day a man told me that I would starve without bread and I remember well I told him, "Never mind, the time would come when I have more bread than any one in the valley," and I have realized the fact.

Before cutting the grain I was called to go home to my family on business in Carson Valley and my brother, Thomas, who was then mining at Hot Springs, took charge of the crop and cut and stacked it. At this time I was preparing to sell out at Carson and move my family, wife and six children, to the new home. We arrived here in September, '65, and were comfortable in little stone cabin, 12 x 12 feet, eight in family.

I brought with me my corn-cracker for us to grind my wheat for bread. This little mill we turned by a crank, my wife and I. At this time I made a little water wheel, fixed a belt to my mill and, believe me, I felt big when I could grind 300 or 400 pounds of corn meal in a day. Necessity is the mother of invention. That winter I made shoes and clogs for my wife and children and self. Then I built a house. For this I hewed slabs at the sawmill and hauled them home and made a good house - kitchen, bedroom and granary. Then stable, corrals and fencing for a little pasture. Never tired from daylight till dark, with my brain quick and full of inventions, making plans, counting cost and going to work with energy and determination till I would accomplish what I intended. To this day I will venture to say that in twenty years I have never failed in one thing that I said I would do, although at the time when I started so-and-so I was poor and destitute and many laughed and scorned me when I mentioned my plans, especially when I said I would build a gristmill, etc. But I have finished all my plans and now realize a good competency at my age of 63 years. But remember that I have no "can't" in my book, and never give up till I reach the mark, building my own houses, painting and graining, etc. Common sense, good judgment and curtailing expenses have made me what I am financially.

I mention this of my experiences not to boast of myself, but for the benefit of beginners and pioneers of new countries. Just think of my wife making candles, sugar, molasses, starch, and even I and the children cutting and burning green cottonwood to have ashes for her to make soap, and I got deer skins to make coats and pants!

The valley is the northwest portion of Inyo county, worthy of the name, "Round Valley," and contains about 7000 acres of land, about half in cultivation. A great portion of the west side is a gravelly, elevated ridge to the Sierra Nevada mountains which are 13,337 feet above the level of the sea. The valley is about 5000 feet higher than the sea. The soil is productive for wheat, oats, barley and corn and vegetables in general. We raise good fruit, apples, peaches, plums, apricots, etc., but not very

profitable for grapes. The early and late frosts are a detriment to fruit every year, but when we do have fruit it is good.

The average per acre of wheat is 1200 to 1700 pounds, and the other grain the same. We have raised a ton per acre. The soil varies, some being sandy, some adobe, some gravelly and the center of the valley black vegetable soil.

No valley in California is provided with water more naturally than this. Pine creek is a large one at the center west, and originates from springs and snow from the Sierra Nevadas. When we need to irrigate the creek is high with an abundance of water, the most clear and delicious in the world. At the north end of the valley is Rock creek, coming around the Sierras and out of the south end of Long Valley through a deep cut in lava rock eight or nine miles, the same quality of water. This is used by the north end of this valley for irrigation. Then another creek from the Sierras, rounding down a ridge to the south end of the valley for the farms on that side; the same quality of water and an abundance of it.

On the sandy and gravelly land alfalfa is grown in abundance, two crops a year. This we feed our cattle in the winter, as the cattle are kept in the summer in Long Valley. The bottom grass is not very nutritious for cattle, but better for horses.

Most all the farms are fenced with sod fences and willows growing out of the sod. Good farmhouses with barns and out-buildings, poultry, hogs, orchards with plenty of good fruit in the summer, the prettiest valley in California. We have a good schoolhouse and good school. No lawyer, no doctor and no preacher in the valley. We live in peace and plenty. I have a grist mill not far from the center of the valley on the west side and grind from 200 to 300 tons of wheat per year to good flour for use in this valley and its surroundings. No mining in here, although there are quartz ledges northwest and south of here. The people are not religious but liberal and very benevolent.

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The above article was never finished down to the time of the death of its writer. He wrote it in 1885, 12 years prior to his death. His good wife followed him to the grave on the 9th day of June, 1899. She was indeed a brave pioneer woman who always strove with might and main to do right. She brought up her children in the way in which they ought to grow and never shirked a duty, no matter how menial. In crossing the plains to the West, she pushed a small handcart a great portion of the distance, hauling her children in that manner. Her first husband died en route and she married Mr. Jones in Utah. The Mormons robbed her of a great deal of clothing and other valuables after her husband died and before she was married again. Her life was filled with sacrifice after sacrifice for her dear ones.