

Title: Eagle Valley and Carson City

Subtitle: Carson City

Author: CCNV

Date: 2008/9/3

URL: <http://www.carsonweather.com/modules/article/view.article.php/c2/5>

Summary: Historical Myth a Month-Myth # 24 & 130
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No! Carson City is not in Carson Valley, despite what some uninformed newcomers to our area may believe. We trust editor Myron Angel's History of Nevada (1881) when we are told that Eagle Valley, where our state capital is located, was named by December 1851. Eagle Valley acquired its name from the trading post in the southwest end of the valley where Frank Hall shot and killed an eagle, then stuffed the bird and mounted it over the station entrance door. Hall, who sold his interest in Eagle Station and Ranch in 1853, died in Carson City in 1902. Three years before his death, Hall repeated the story of Eagle Valley's naming to journalist Alfred Doten who published it in his history of Nevada's capital.

But should we always trust Myron Angel's ground breaking work? The myth in this story relates to the sale of Eagle Ranch in 1858 and the events that immediately followed. Virtually every account of the transaction has John B. Mankins selling the ranch, which composed a large portion of Eagle Valley, to Abraham Curry, John J. Musser, Frank M. Proctor, and Benjamin F. Green for a \$1,000, "the payment being \$500 coin and some mustangs." The story is found in Angel's History of Nevada (pp.532-33) and cites Carson City's Nevada Tribune of July 17, 1876. Doten, in 1899, claimed it was ". . . half a dozen mustangs."

Well, what's wrong with this story since the sources are relatively contemporary to the event?! Abe Curry had been dead some three years in 1876, Musser died in 1871, and Proctor and Green had left Nevada. So who related this story to the newspaper, or had the myth of Abe Curry and the founding of Carson City already begun? Clearly, it had!

If one examines the deed transferring the property from "J.B. Mankin[s] to Curry, Proctor & Musser" on August 12, 1858, and filed with the Ormsby County Recorder on June 11, 1862, a number of facts stand out. First of all, B.F. Green, Frank Proctor's father-in-law, was not a partner in the transaction, however he witnessed it and had the deed recorded. Other reliable sources tell us that after the completion of the deal, Proctor gave Green one-half of his one-third holding in the Eagle Ranch. More importantly, while the selling price was \$1,000, the down payment was \$300 and the balance was to be paid within thirty days. There is no mention of mustangs in the deed, although that does not rule out the possibility that Mankins later took the horses in lieu of cash. Whatever the case, only Doris Cerveri, in writing her biography of Abraham Curry (1990), ever examined the deed to confirm the legal terms of the sale. Angel's account of the Eagle Ranch sale has been repeated ad nauseam in publications, and now we find it broadcast throughout the world on history-related websites.

It is also Angel's History of Nevada that gives Abe Curry the status of Carson City's principal founder in 1858 and relegates Musser, Proctor, and Green to the shadows. The truth be known, Curry would not emerge as a mover and shaker in the new town until 1861 following Congress' creation of Nevada Territory. John Musser and Frank Proctor, both prominent attorneys in Sierra County,

California, before relocating to western Utah Territory, were far more active than Curry in the political effort to create a new territory. Musser, the former Sierra County District Attorney who ran unsuccessfully for the California State Senate in 1858, was selected as president of a constitutional convention in July 1859. The objective: secede from Utah Territory and create a provisional Nevada Territory. Following the convention in Genoa, he was elected the provisional territory's delegate to Congress and traveled to Washington, D.C. Proctor, the former Sierra County Assessor, while serving as a convention delegate from the Humboldt District was chosen as a vice-president and declared his candidacy for Chief Justice of the Territorial Supreme Court. Curry, too, served as a delegate, yet the records of the convention portray him as a minor player from Eagle Valley.

Abraham Curry, the last to arrive to the California gold country and Sierra County, was indeed the least prominent of the four men who laid out Carson City in Utah Territory. Even Benjamin Green, who was not a full partner in this business consortium, had recently served as Sierra County Treasurer. Curry's business acumen and perseverance ultimately propelled his career in eclipsing those of his partners prior to his death in 1873.

Looking back, we can say that Curry clearly deserves to be called the "Father" of Carson City for all he did to promote and develop the town. However there were other principal players in the drama and intrigue surrounding the purchase of Eagle Ranch, the founding of Carson City, and the establishing of Nevada Territory that for too long have been overshadowed by the much-deserved tributes to Abe Curry. Curry has a statue on the legislative mall and a street name to remind us of his accomplishments, Musser and Proctor only street names, and Green has been all but forgotten.

Credit Myron Angel for shaping our perceptions over the years and, at times, inadvertently misleading us!

(Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, January 1998. Reprinted in the December 2006 edition.)

For the complete "Historical Myth a Month" series, visit <http://nevadaculture.org/docs/nsla/archives/myth/sitemap.htm>