

## A Brief History of the Winnemucca, Nevada Area

The Humboldt River is northern Nevada's geographical mainstream. Flowing slowly through the valley, it has cut through the rugged mountains of northern Nevada. The river's course has been the route of Indians, pioneers, miners, railroads, highways, and now, superhighways.

Peopled only by wandering Indians for untold centuries, the river valley was first seen by white man through the eyes of the famous western pathfinder, Peter Skene Ogden, in 1828. Only yesterday, as sands of time flow by. Ogden and his party of fur trappers travelled the brush covered valleys from what is now eastern Oregon. Following the course of the river east for some 100 miles before turning north, he called the river the "Unknown", for he could not geographically fit it in with the course of any known rivers. It would be many years before John Charles Fremont would define the Great Basin and the courses of the rivers it contains that have no outlet to the seas. Appropriately enough, the next white men to see the Humboldt called it the "Barren River". It doesn't take much imagination to figure out why. Other names were given to the river before it was named for the famed geographer, Baron Von Humboldt, who, by the way, never saw any part of the river.

A trading post was built at the present site of Winnemucca in 1850, for it was the only place for many miles in either direction that the river could be forded, and it has been found that the best route to Boise, Idaho, region was from this point. First known as French Ford, the trading post was named "Winnemucca" by an army map maker in the early '60's. The name, of course, was to honor the principal Indian Chief in Northern Nevada, a Paiute whose people often bloodied the water of the river in disputing with the white men control of the barren deserts and mountains that were their home, and for which their tribe fought the most bloody and decisive battle ever fought in the State of Nevada. The battle all but wiped out an army led by Major Ormsby near the Pyramid Lake.

One of Winnemucca's first permanent buildings, built in 1863 and still standing, is the Winnemucca Hotel: a hospitable hostelry famed for its wonderful Basque food. Erased by the hands of time are Chinatown, the mining mills, breweries, and railroad roundhouses.

The Central Pacific Railroad gave Winnemucca its first real permanency when the Chinese coolies spiked rails to ties following the grade up the valley of the Humboldt in 1869. Winnemucca

their herds to death. Typical of all western towns, fires wiped out blocks of wooden huts, which were rebuilt on the hot ashes, only to be destroyed again in a few years.

World War I made heroes as well as casualties of Winnemucca boys. Those that came home were soon involved with bootleggers and prostitutes depending on the extent of their thirst. The town grew, but slowly, till after the depression, when the community had had its share of the WPA, PWA, NRA, CCC, and the like.

Growing as rapidly as the rest of the western country, today Winnemucca is a crossroads in the same sense that it was 100 years ago. Catering to travelers, ranchers, miners, and pleasure-seekers, it is a sparkling gem in the vast country of the west.

Compiled by the Humboldt County Chamber of Commerce, located in Historic Nixon Hall, Winnemucca, Nevada.