

GRAY'S STATION

I. Earliest Gray Grant Deed

The defining document establishing the location of Gray's ranch in 1864 describes it in metes and bounds. The following abstract shows that it is defined by impermanent landmarks.

L.W. MacDonald to Joseph Gray (NC Deed 15:361) 16 Aug 1864. Property description: On Dutch Flat-Donner Lake Wagon Road in Donner Lake Valley and on the north side of Big Truckee River 3 miles east of Donner Lake. Two quarter sections containing timber land. Surveyed by Wardlow¹ starting at a yellow pine on the north bank of the Big Truckee River, corners defined by posts inscribed J&HG.

The log house and fence shown in the 1865 survey (Appendix A) just north of the NE 1/4 of Section 15 is undoubtedly part of the MacDonald-Gray parcel.²

Subsequent tax records imply that Joseph Gray's hay yard was located on the north side of the Dutch Flat and Donner Lake Wagon Road. His inn and corral was located on the road's south side where it meets the crossroad leading to the bridge over the Truckee River³. The bridge led to the steam saw mill on the south bank of the river jointly owned by Joe Gray and his partner, George Schaffer.⁴ Gray is known also to have operated a timber camp northeast of Section 15. (Gray's timber properties are beyond the scope of this discussion.)⁵

Section 15 was part of the land designated by the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR) when it filed its selection with the State Land Office under Patent #5 granted to it by the U.S. Government. The patent explicitly recognized preemptive claims of private owners within the section. No recorded documents have been found to clarify the boundaries of Gray's holdings with respect to the CPRR Patent. If Gray presented Crocker with a prior claim to his hay yard, inn and corral, then Crocker either ignored it or negotiated some unrecorded settlement with Gray. In fact, deeds show that it was Charles Crocker who sold Gray the lands on both the southeast and southwest corners of Bridge and Jibboom in 1871--six years after the founding of Gray's Station.⁶

If Gray's original quarter sections did not lie within Section 15, how then can one explain the deed from McDonald which states the property lay on the Truckee River and the wagon road? Furthermore why would the *Truckee Republican* later state that Gray was the wealthiest man in the Sierra having once owned all the land that the CPRR later claimed?⁷

¹ Wardlow survey was not found among survey maps at Nevada County Recorder nor Bureau of Land Management.

² Since the MacDonald-Gray transfer preceded the 1865 survey, it appears that the deed refers to 'quarter sections' merely to specify a quantity of land, that is to say, two 160-acre quarter sections. These would not necessarily coincide with the subsequent numbered sections defined in the survey. The purpose of official land surveys was to define townships, ranges and sections with respect to a fixed point, in this case the Mt. Diablo Meridian.

³ NC Assessor Book, 1867, Meadow Lake Township, p. 163.

⁴ NC Deeds 27:381.

⁵ Although Elle Ellen was the prominent timber operator and land owner in the Truckee region in the early days, Joseph Gray operated a sawmill at Railroad Camp 20. A famous massacre of Chinese woodchoppers occurred at Gray's sawmill in 1876. See Chapter 8, *Showdown at Truckee* for details.

⁶ NC Deeds 69:170.

⁷ *Truckee Republican*, 10 January 1880, Gray Anniversary.

II. Early Development Adjacent to Gray's

Charles Crocker had begun selling lots along the wagon road in Section 15 as early as 1868 although technically the CPRR did not transfer title to him until June 1870. Long before that time various businesses and residents had already begun to settle on the wagon road west of Gray's. Families clustered on the north side near Bridge Street facing Gray's inn and corral. Faro and keno gambling houses as well as saloons and bagnios rose up on both sides of the road towards the west.⁸ This became the heart of the rowdy district described by an eye-witness as 'lurid'.⁹

The question arises: did Coburn's Station begin to encroach on Gray's in 1867 and early 1868? Or did the town of Truckee begin to build up between the two villages in anticipation of rail service on the CPRR. As early as 1867 the *Meadow Lake Sun* stated that "Truckee Station, formerly Coburn's Station," was "building up rapidly."¹⁰

It is necessary to look at the evolution of certain properties along East Main Street in order to determine where the saloons and brothels left off and the residences at Gray's Station began. To do so it is helpful to look at the earliest Truckee townsite and fire insurance maps compared to Nevada County Tax Assessor and Deed books for 1867-70.¹¹ Some ownership seems to provide location links: saloon owners such as Henry Hall and Nellie Collie and homeowners J.W. Gilbert and Joseph Marzen. Frank Rabel was both saloon and home owner. An early deed dated November 18, 1867 refers to a 30 x 150 foot parcel on the north side of the Donner Lake Wagon Road "set in Truckee (Coburn's Station)." The deed transfers title from Davids to Yager and Patch for \$1000 and states that "A. Burgess" owns the lot adjoining on the east.¹² The Burgess property can be used to establish locations of other early businesses on what became Main Street East as subsequent documents will show.

Advertisements and articles in the short-lived *Truckee Tribune* provide additional evidence of commercial building in Truckee after the fire of 1868. It is necessary to consult a variety of sources because these villages developed without benefit of many recorded deeds or pre-emptive claims. Those flocking to the region built homes and stores with a casual attitude toward formal documentation. That the county courthouse was fifty miles away as the crow flies and considerably farther by wagon or stagecoach, helped foster the attitude.

III. The Red Light District

Suddenly in late 1868 after the CPRR service opened and Coburn's burned, deeds were recorded for seemingly every transaction. Crocker himself was selling lots defined by his new townsite map. The terms of the railroad patent came to the attention of residents and shop keepers realized they might lose their land to the railroad if they did not authenticate their holdings. Starting in August 1868 the rebuilding of the village proceeded at a frenzied pace. Commerce shifted east of Coburn's toward the Truckee 'depot'. The new business district lined up parallel to the tracks creating a Front Street and Plaza. The old wagon road, called Main Street, veered off to the northeast behind Front Street toward Gray's. Entertainment of every kind located along "Main Street East." Title transfers were recorded as fast as the buildings went up. Deeds from August 1868 onward are a rich source of documentation.

Had structures along East Main Street near Gray's also burned in the 1868 fire? Did the 1868-1869 deeds serve to document new acquisition and development on this stretch of the old wagon road or did they simply protect pre-existing ownership?

In her memoirs the eyewitness previously mentioned states that the first four properties on East Main Street west of Bridge Street contained respectable residences. She claimed people called it "Second Street." Immediately west of those homes, began the saloons and brothels. People called that part "Back Street". This was a place of vagrancy and crime--Truckee's future notorious Red Light District.

IV. Documentation

⁸ Bagnio is a 19th century term used to refer to certain types of brothels.

⁹ Jessie Roberson, memoirs of childhood in Coburn's and Gray's Stations. The memoirs compiled by Kathy Graziano of Kansas are scheduled to be published in the summer 2003 by Western Trails Publishers, Reno, NV.

¹⁰ *Meadow Lake Sun*, August 10, 1867, 3:1.

¹¹ See Section 3, Property, and 4, Assessor's Records, for Gilbert and Gray at Gray's Station and for Lobner, Hall, Hoy, Grinage, Burgess, David, Keeler, and Kimball located on the wagon road at Coburn's Station just west of Gray's.

¹² NC Deeds 30:148.

Tax records show that J.W. Gilbert had already established a fruit and grocery store at Gray's Station by 1867. Yet the first deed recorded granting title to Gilbert was dated December 10, 1868.¹³ It identifies the parcel as lots 1 and 2 on the north side of East Main which according to the Truckee townsite map are located at the corner of Bridge and East Main (across from Gray's corral).

Assessor's records contain the best information for 1867 property ownership. They identify owners on the north and south side of East Main at Coburn's---but adjacent to Gray's Station. These same owners later recorded deeds for those properties which show their proximity to Gray's.¹⁴ It seems possible that by 1867 Coburn's had expanded all the way to Gray's. The dividing line between the Red Light District and the residential district may have also been the line between Coburn's (or Truckee) and Gray's.

A more precise location of the line between Gray's Station and the Red Light District might be inferred from looking at documents for the Gray property itself. When the CPRR surveyed Truckee station in 1868 it divided the townsite into Blocks A through H.¹⁵ The resulting map did not number the property at Bridge and East Main (Second). Instead the map shows it as a large triangle of land on the south side of Main Street East divided into two large unnumbered parcels. Deeds refer to this triangle as the "north half of Block B."¹⁶ The line between the two parcels may have separated the former Gray's Station from the rest of Truckee--and may have been aligned with corresponding border between Gray's hay yard and the brothels across the street on the north side of East Main. In an 1876 deed from Charles Crocker of CPRR to Rabel, the westernmost of the two parcels is referred to as part of Block B on the townsite map and bounded on the west by an alley.¹⁷ The location of this key property and alley is shown on the Sanborn fire insurance map of 1885. (See Appendix D).

The townsite map (and deeds referring to it) does not show a letter designation for the block on the north side of Main Street East. It is divided into numbered lots starting at lot 1 at Bridge Street and proceeding west to lot 44 (where Main Street West begins). Several deeds refer to this block as "Block L". Another large undivided unnumbered triangular lies between present Jibboom, High Streets, Bridge and Spring Streets.)

Certain deeds help to locate historic businesses and residences on both the north and south sides of East Main. J.B. Henry¹⁸ stated that his property was bounded by Gilbert & Co. on the east. This would put Henry's lot at lot 3, next to Gilbert's lots 1 and 2. W.W. Moran's deed to Joseph Marzen¹⁹ states his 25 ft lot is bounded on the east by Mr. Henry. This is restated in his homestead²⁰. This coincides nicely with a comment in the memoirs of Jessie Roberson that a friend of their family had built two houses at the corner of Bridge and Second, one of which her family resided in.²¹ She claimed that the respectable district on Second Street consisted of only four houses. Therefore it might be claimed that Joseph Marzen's neighbor's to the west were the start of the Red Light District. For some time Marzen's neighboring property was vacant. The first property identified clearly as a series of brothels occurs at lot 12.

¹³ NC Deeds 32:404.

¹⁴ See Section 4, Assessor's Records, for the following names: Marzen, Gilbert and Henry adjacent to Gray; Miller, Sharr, Burgess, Faye, Grinage, Truckee Exchange, Ohio House in the saloon district. A case can be made for the proximity of these saloons to Gray's by examining the deeds and probate of one of Truckee's most prominent early madame, Eppimania Anaya as shown in Sec. 3.

¹⁵ Deeds refer to the 1868 townsite map by block letter. However the Nevada County Recorder does not have a copy of this map. The earliest townsite map now available to the public is the CPRR map of 1886 at California State Railroad Museum, Sacramento, or 1890 map available at NC Recorder. Current Assessor's maps are constructed on a base map showing the underlying early lot divisions.

¹⁶ The south half of Block B is Front Street.

¹⁷ Crocker to Rabel, NC Deeds 42:119, 1876.

¹⁸ Henry, NC Homesteads 2:622

¹⁹ Marzen, NC Deeds 32:612, 22 Jan. 1869

²⁰ Marzen, NC Homesteads 3:6, Aug 10, 1869. Unfortunately it also stated his neighbor on the West was a Mr. Fountain. This produces an apparent conflict--one of many conflicts between early documents. Marzen's homestead puts his residence on the south side of road (25 x 100) bounded on east by Henry and west by Fountain. His deed shows he owned property on the north side of road (25 x 100) bounded on east by house of Henry and on south by Lechter. (No Lechter deed was found to confirm this). Adding to the confusion is Fountain's NC Homestead 2:622 showing him on south side of road bounded on east by several names--none of which are Marzen. Fountain is bounded on the west by Barney Conneley's Mountain House which presents more discrepancies. Conneley's mortgage states Mountain House was on the north side of "Back Street" opposite Carroll's Truckee Brewery--known to have been located on the north side of the intersection of West and East Main. The Conneley mortgage states the property is bounded on east by Fountain. One possible interpretation is that "Back Street" is not East Main but is the alley running parallel to Front Street. That would put Mountain House on the north side of the alley but the south side of East Main where Fountain was located.

²¹ Jessie Roberson, op. cit.

Truckee's most famous madam, Eppie Anaya acquired lot 12 in 1877 and eventually owned lots 12-16.²² The Anaya deed locates lot 12 as facing the property of Frank Rabel across the street. Frank Rabel also owned a saloon on Front Street. It is not clear if he used his East Main Street property as his residence or as a saloon.

A deed from Henry Hall to Nellie Collie (Colby)²³ may also help locate the border of the Red Light District. This deed describes a 32 x 110 lot on Main bounded on north by property of Joseph Gray and on south by Henry Hall's Orlean's Saloon and Lodging House.²⁴

Westward of Eppie Anaya's brothel's, lay lot 18 originally occupied by a Mrs. Miller²⁵. The 1868-1870 Assessor's books show the Miller property to be a restaurant bounded on the west by the Ohio House Restaurant of Burgess mentioned above. This accounts for lots 17-19. Lot 20 is discussed under the report on the Reed House, Appendix E-1. From certain key properties such as Rabel and Burgess it is possible to lay out a diagram of early business on East Main Street.

The vacant triangular parcel behind the lots on the north side of East Main consists of a very steep hill. No record has been found that it was ever developed in early days. It contained a set of steep stairs leading from East Main to High Street above. Two references to this stair have been found. The deed to lot 20 refers to a "walk leading up the hill" on its western boundary.²⁶ The 1890 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows this stairway at approximately that location.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion it appears that the development of Truckee was a gradual process and probably more an outgrowth of Coburn's than of Gray's Station. It also appears that Truckee did not spontaneously grow from the ashes of Coburn's. It had been growing eastward from Coburn's for several years prior to the opening of the railroad and the Coburn fire. In the end the Truckee Red Light District was hard upon the boundaries of Joseph Gray's Inn and farm.

Nothing remains on the surface that can shed any light on the Red Light District. Chances for subsurface exploration for artifacts disappear regularly as land on East Main is systematically disturbed or covered over as part of recent accelerated demolitions and development.

Joseph Gray left Truckee in 1886. The Truckee Republican noted his departure on 2 Jan 1886 , page 3, column 3 .

²² Anaya, NC Deeds 54:546 and Supr Ct. Probate #270, 1886. (see abstracts in Part III Deeds and Probates. See discussion in Appendix 5 - A, Jibboom Street.)

²³ Collie, NC Deeds 34:589, 18 Nov. 1869.

²⁴ Unfortunately another discrepancy arises. NC Assessor records for 1870 put both Hall and Collie on north side of Main. It is difficult to judge whether assessor's records are more accurate than recorded deeds. Recorded deeds are mere transcriptions of original deeds and therefore subject to transcription errors. Assessor's books contain brief handwritten alphabetical lists of properties and therefore are obviously transcribed from field notes. Handwriting misinterpretation probably produced errors in both types of records--particularly differentiating between "north" and "south" as well as between "east" and "west" which in many cases was abbreviated "n" and "s" and "e" and "w".

²⁵ NC Deeds 53:137 Crocker to Rainford mentioning Miller on east ; also NC Miscellaneous Records 2:503 abstracted in Part III, Deeds.

²⁶ James Reed to Dominga Carasco NC Deeds 50:713, 1876