



The Sweetwater Ranch House in 1918.

# Mono County Historical Society Bridgeport, CA 2023 Newsletter **Sweetwater Ranch**

The Sweetwater Ranch is located 18 miles northeast of Bridgeport, six miles north of the Nevada State Line. The close connection between Bridgeport and the Sweetwater Valley has endured for more than 170 years because of shared ranching, farming, the waters of the East Walker River, and area mining activity. The valley was named for its good artesian waters.

The Sweetwater Mountains overlooking the Sweetwater Ranch are actually situated in California. The ranch is about four miles southeast of the foothills and was settled in 1859 by Irish immigrant Henry Williams. For 50 years the spread was referred to by locals as the Williams Ranch.

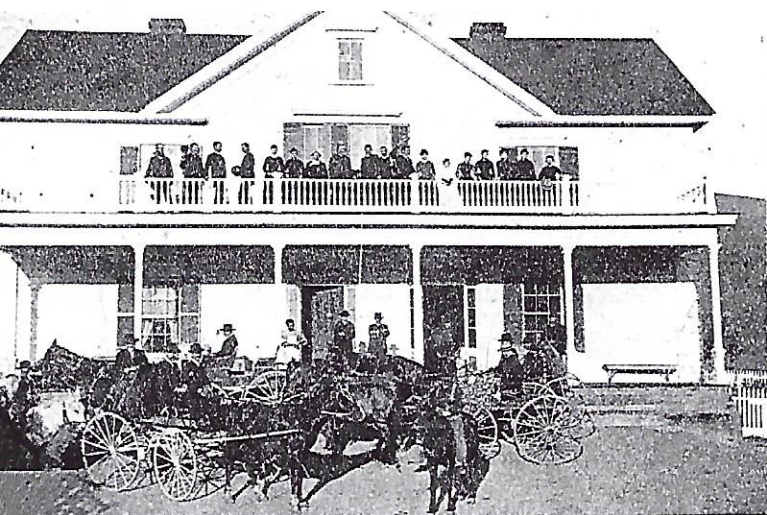
After gold and silver were discovered in Aurora during 1860, the Carson-Aurora Toll Road (Nevada State Route 338) was created for busy freight and passenger traffic. Henry Williams owned the road with his partner Angus McLeod, proprietor of the Exchange Hotel in Aurora. The Williams Ranch served as a rest stop known as Sweetwater Station. An adjoining ranch was owned by James Atchison, another Irish immigrant. Atchison later married Katie Jolly, adopted daughter of Henry and Mary Williams.

A short distance south of the Sweetwater Ranch, at a sharp bend in the East Walker River, a stage stop called the Elbow Ranch was built in 1860. The junction continued easterly on the Hawthorne-Sweetwater Toll Road that headed to Fletcher Station, also known as Six Mile Station since it was six miles from Aurora. This unpaved road is still being used as a shortcut to Hawthorne, Nevada. In March 1881 a Post Office was established at the Elbow Ranch but it was discontinued in September the same year.

The Carson-Aurora Road was extended to Bridgeport in 1868 to accommodate the increasing mining activity around Bodie.



Aurora in 1890.



Guests at the Mary Hotel in the 1880s.

Henry Williams began construction of a large ranch house at Sweetwater Station in 1876. It was built with lumber shipped to San Francisco and sent to Sweetwater by rail and ox teams. It was finished in 1882 and although used as a residence, it also accommodated those enroute to Aurora and Bodie. It had 24 rooms, a large kitchen and dining room, a big dance hall upstairs and a store. Traveling shows performed in the dance hall. The building was named the Mary Hotel for Henry's wife. The Sweetwater Post Office operated out of the ranch from 1870 until it closed in 1925.

In June 1880 the Carson Stage was robbed north of Sweetwater Station by road agents. They threatened the driver with shotguns and demanded the cash box that contained nearly \$4000. The driver complied and the passengers were ordered out onto the road where the two men took their watches and money. The coach was allowed to proceed and the thieves got away.

More excitement occurred at the Sweetwater Ranch when employee Shorty Cosgrove got drunk and caused trouble. Owner Henry Williams told Cosgrove to sober up and get back to work or leave. Cosgrove threatened the boss and William McLaughlin came to his aid. Cosgrove shot McLaughlin and ran to the post office. When Deputy Sheriff Edward Moran arrived, Cosgrove rode off towards the California State Line on one of the ranch horses. Moran chased him on horseback and yelled at Cosgrove to stop or he would be shot. Cosgrove refused and Moran killed him. McLaughlin survived his wounds.

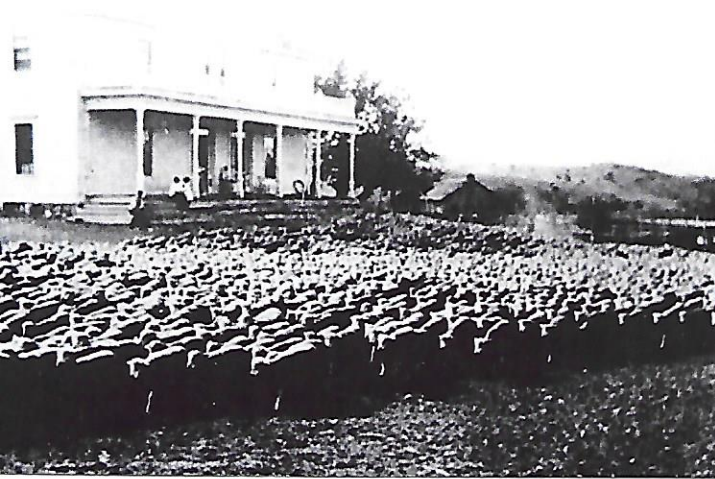
Mining at nearby Masonic showed some promise but not much happened there until after 1900. Prospectors had sporadic success on the eastern slopes of the Sweetwater Mountains until rich strikes were discovered in 1878 above Frying Pan Creek and the Patterson Mining District was formed. Those enroute to the mining camps passed by the Sweetwater Ranch where stage passengers rented rooms at the hotel. Teamsters bunked in the barns to care for stock. Paiute Indians lived in valley encampments and were hired to work on the ranch. Their children also attended the Sweetwater School.

Henry Williams passed in 1890 and Mary died in 1892. They were buried in Aurora and their estate was settled by executor Simeon Booker, an Aurora businessman and friend. In 1898 the Yparraguirre Brothers expressed an interest in the ranch. Juan, Pablo and Francisco Yparraguirre bought it in 1901 and included their brother Leon in the venture.

Juan Yparraguirre was a Spanish Basque born in Echalar, Navarra, Spain. In 1871-1872 he sailed to San Francisco with breeding bulls for a livestock firm. He herded sheep from the central valley to San Diego until he bought the Hotel Vasco in San Francisco in the mid-1870s. It was popular lodging among Basques because it was equipped with a kitchen, dining room and a handball court. In 1886 Juan married Marie (Maria) Etchebarren and she gave birth to Paul, Frank, Elena, Catalina, Elvira and Emilia.



Juan & Maria in 1886.



Sheep at the ranch in the 1910s.

Juan's brothers Pablo, Leon and Francisco (Frank) came to the U.S. in the mid-late 1870s. Juan was active in the ranch affairs but continued operating the Hotel Vasco. The ranch was headquarters for the spring shearing of 23,000 sheep. The brothers also raised horses, mules and cattle and had a dairy that provided them with milk and cheese. The Hotel Vasco was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and Juan was unable to rebuild. He moved his family to Reno to spend more time on the ranch.

Frank Yparraguirre married Josefina Arriet in 1892. She cooked at the hotel for a while. Leon's daughter Emily was the teacher at the the Sweetwater School between 1909-1910. Students included the Fulstone and Conway children and the local Indians.

Frank bought the Elbow Ranch in 1911 and added it to the family property. Juan's wife Maria and local rancher William Dressler transferred the Elbow ownership in 1927 to Bodie Tom, a Chinese businessman from Bodie.

In August 1911 Sweetwater Ranch employee J.J.D. Miller was in Bridgeport to record a mining claim in the mountains south of the ranch, which Frank Yparraguirre witnessed. After Miller finished his ranch chores he started working in the mine and replenished supplies at the ranch. In October friends went to look for him at the mine after he had not been seen for two weeks. Miller was found dead, partially buried in the mine shaft with a broken leg, unable to extract himself. For eight days Miller wrote notes recording his last moments until he died. Mono County officials took the body to Bridgeport for an autopsy.



Frank & Juan, 1918-1920

Pablo Yparraguirre died at an early age. Juan passed away in 1923. The Yparraguirre family eventually dropped the "Y" in their name and shortened it to Parraguirre. Juan and Maria's son Paul Parraguirre became an official with the Union Oil Company and served as the Mono County Tax Assessor between 1939-1955 while operating a motel in Bridgeport. His wife Bertha was a longtime school teacher in Bridgeport and Coleville. Their sons Paul, David and Loren were Nevada lawyers. Son Paul served as the Nevada Deputy Attorney General, Chief Deputy District Attorney of Clark County and the Judge for the Nevada Fifth Judicial District Court. His son Ron is currently the Chief Justice of the Nevada Supreme Court.

In 1923 Maria Yparraguirre bought out Frank's ranch holdings. In 1924 she sold the property to Tom Williams. The family continued to graze sheep on surrounding parcels until 1942.

Walter and Frank Muller of Southern California purchased the ranch from Tom Williams before he died in 1940.

The Muller Brothers operated a high-class service station and Chrysler dealership in the Hollywood film community. They were also owners of the Flying M Ranch, north of the old Fletcher Station, that Barron Hilton later bought in the 1960s.

The historic Sweetwater Ranch house burned down in August of 1949. The blaze was believed to have started in the storeroom attic. Ranch employees were working stock some distance from the house but returned to save the barns and out-buildings.

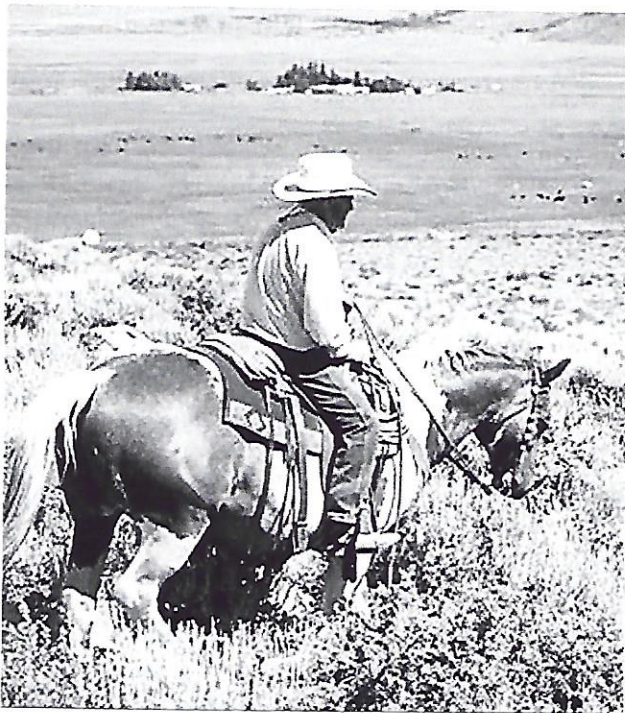


Actor Clark Gable at the ranch in 1949 before the fire.

In 1950 Carl Rodi and his partner Rollin Eckis bought the ranch from the Muller Brothers. Rodi was an attorney and Eckis became the president of the Richfield Oil Company. Benny Romero, a descendant of Spanish Basques from Bilbao, Spain was hired as the ranch manager in 1974.

William Weaver of Echo Bay Mining and owner of a Caribbean cruise line bought the Sweetwater Ranch in 1986. He also acquired the Bridgeport Meadows and the Van Horn Meadow parcels in Bridgeport plus additional land in Nevada. Benny Romero continued as ranch manager until his retirement in 1997.

In 1991 Nevada rancher Harvey Hunewill had been flying his P51 Mustang near the ranch while John Ascuaga was conducting his annual Bridgeport to Smith Valley cattle drive. Hunewill died after he lost control and crashed.



Romero riding near the ranch.

Weaver put the Sweetwater Ranch up for sale in 2001 and asked Benny Romero to solicit buyers. Romero spearheaded an effort with the Conservation Fund, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Department and the Range Education Institute to buy the ranch and make it a nonprofit hands-on educational center.

The ranch was to be purchased by a "conservation buyer", funded through corporate Conservation Fund sponsors and ultimately donated to the University of Nevada College of Agriculture. It would become a focal point for education, research and conflict resolutions related to Nevada's natural resource issues while remaining a working cattle ranch. The water rights would remain with the land. Negotiations with Weaver failed and the project was abandoned.

The Sweetwater Ranch was sold in 2003 to Bryan Masini, a Mason Valley, Nevada rancher. It is currently owned by Masini in partnership with David Lewis.



The Sweetwater Ranch today.

After Benny Romero retired he acquired the Kirkwood Ranch property in Bridgeport. The barns which were built in 1871 were renovated and opened in 1989 as the Bridgeport Ranch, Barns and Terrace. It is a unique outdoor venue for country-western singers, songwriters, poets, weddings and various other celebrations. The giant U.S. flag on the property was dedicated by the Marines from the Mountain Warfare Training Center north of Bridgeport.

#### SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND PHOTOS

Mono County Museum, Bridgeport - Benny Romero, Bridgeport, CA - Bridgeport Chronicle Union  
Northern Nevada Business Weekly - Reno Evening Gazette - Mineral County Independent News  
Mineral County Nevada Genealogy and History

*Mineral County Nevada, Vol. 3*, Sue Silver, Museum Associates of Mineral County, 2011.

*Smith Valley Nevada, A History*, Mary Ann Miller, Double M Book Co., Wellington, NV, 2004.

*Aurora, Nevada's Silent City on the Hill*, Sue Silver, 2011.

*Along the East Walker River Nevada*, Sue Silver, 2013 .

## PASSINGS

### **GEORGE W. TODD III**

November 18, 1943 - February 2, 2022

George, known to many as "Skip", was famous for his artwork, including pen and ink drawings of the Mono County Courthouse, Bodie and other area scenes. He received many awards for his pictures that appeared on magazine covers, reports and books. George grew up in Southern California and was married to his wife Gayle for 53 years.

Between 1976 and 1984 they lived in Bridgeport and then moved to Inyo County where George worked for the County as an Engineering Technician. He designed the official County Seal and retired in 1997. In 2004 George and Gayle began a 17 year trek exploring the southwest in their trailer. His passions were family, art, photography, environment, space exploration and music.

In May of 2021 George and Gayle decided to slow down and bought another home in Bridgeport. Nine months later George died suddenly of a massive heart attack just two and half hours before a scheduled stent procedure. He is survived by Gayle, their daughter Shannon, son Jason and three grandsons. He was 78.

### **JOYCE E. GLAZIER**

December 24, 1926 - August 7, 2022

Joyce was born in Sweetwater, Nevada to Lee and Emma Tom. She attended the Stewart Indian School in Carson City. After graduation she moved back home, married William Glazier in 1946 and had sons, Lester, Herb, John and Robert. William died in 1954 and Joyce moved to Bridgeport where she and Kenneth August had son Carl and daughters June, Rose, Penny, Verna and Ginger. She worked at the Walker River Lodge and Slick's Court before staying home to care for her children.

She was involved with the development and continued growth of the Bridgeport Indian Colony, rarely missing tribal meetings and events. She was a strong and determined single mother who babysat and raised her grandson. Joyce enjoyed occasional casino trips and weekend visits in Yerington with her brother Stan and his wife Imma Jean. Her annual Christmas morning gift exchanges were very important events in her life. She never complained of hardships and heartaches and never spoke ill of anyone. Joyce is survived by her sons Herb and Robert, daughter June August, six grandchildren, four great-grandchildren and numerous nephews and nieces. She was 95.

### **RICHARD HAZEN WIGHT**

October 12, 1946 - September 21., 2022

Richard was born in Pasadena, California. An accomplished surfer, and a professional motorcycle racer for Honda and Yamaha, high points for him were racing at Laguna Seca and riding with Steve McQueen in the desert at El Mirage. An avid fisherman, Richard had a captain's license and ran fishing boats out of San Diego and Long Beach. He served with the Army in Vietnam, traveled around the world several times and studied Mechanical Engineering at UC Santa Barbara.

For almost 40 years he worked for propane companies in Bridgeport, Walker, Topaz and the Smith Valley. Always available to his customers, he would stop what he was doing and go out in the middle of the night, during storms, holidays and weekends, taking one of his beloved yellow labs (Rusty, Rudy, Rip, Rusty #2 and Rocky). His rule was, if the dog couldn't go, he wouldn't go. Never without his dog, he was content to sit in one of the local bars, enjoy a cold Coors Light and hang out watching football, racing, fishing or listening to music. Richard is survived by his love, Roxanne, his sister Kat and brother Skip. He was 75.

## MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Mono County Historical Society and the Mono County Museum are funded by memberships, donations and sales. The Mono County Tourism and Film Commission has supported MCHS for eight years by reimbursing costs for calendar production. The Museum Curator and the Board of Trustees are volunteers. The Museum Docent is the only paid employee.

During 2023 the museum will be open May 25 through September 30, Tuesday-Saturday, 9am-4pm. Admissions: Adults/\$2.00, Seniors 55+/\$1.50, Children 6-17/\$1.00. Children under six are free. The museum docent is Pam Haas-Duhart. Visit the MCHS website at [www.monocomuseum.org](http://www.monocomuseum.org). Museum telephone 760-932-7004.

The Mono County Historical Society Board of Trustees consists of President/Curator Kent Stoddard, Vice President Pam Haas-Duhart, Treasurer Janelle Mills, Secretary Sharon Stoddard and Nonofficer Voting Trustees Lynda Bryant Pemberton, Mary Lent and Jeff Simensen.

Patron and Life Memberships are valid for life. All other memberships are renewable each year effective January 1. MCHS is a registered nonprofit organization per Section 501c3 of the Internal Revenue Code and a public charity under Section 509a2, Federal Tax ID 77-0191728.

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### MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP, RENEWALS AND DONATIONS

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