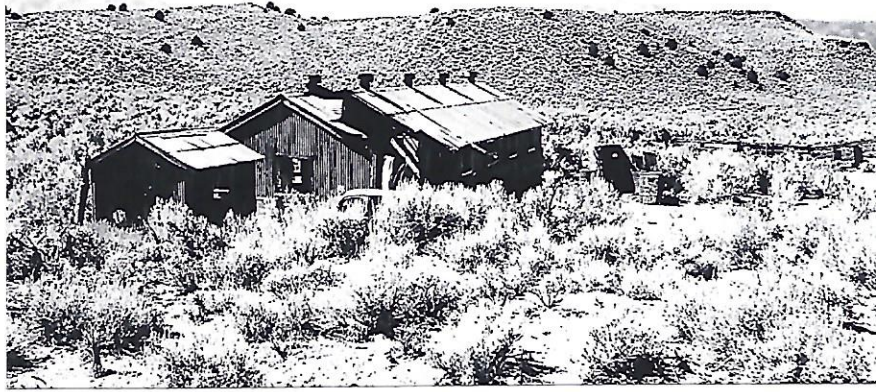


Mono County  
Historical Society  
Bridgeport, CA  
2024 Newsletter  
**Two-Bit Dairy**



The Two-Bit Dairy in 1998.

For many years, Bridgeport Valley farms and ranches were sources of food and feed, but they often doubled as dairies and maintained herds of milk cows. Two examples were the 1000 acre Waltze Dairy Ranch, and the Huntoon Ranch six miles north of Bridgeport, which was primarily a sheep ranch.

In 1921 Bridgeport ranchers discussed building a large dairy on land set aside for the proposed reservoir, with the hope of stopping the project. The Bridgeport Chronicle-Union reported, "Will Bridgeport Valley be better as a lake or a dairy? Will a tourist resort build up your school, pro rata with a well-organized dairy business?". It added that the land would, "support a good many dairy string". The reservoir won the contest.

In 1932 the Dressler Ranch on the west side of the valley was selling milk products under the banner, "Dressler's Mountain Meadow Dairy". The Day Ranch at the edge of town was also in the dairy business. The December 2, 1933 Bridgeport Chronicle Union reported Leland Day had just moved his dairy stock to Smith Valley for the winter.

There were other dairies just outside of the Bridgeport Valley. The Yparraguirre family operated one at their Sweetwater Ranch, six miles north of the Nevada State Line. In 1936 Ollie Tobey had a dairy farm on the Conway Ranch in the Mono Basin. In 1938 R.C. Harvey was operating the Mono Lake Dairy in Lee Vining, and as late as 1949 the Sierra Dairy in Lee Vining sold Sierra Farms Milk and Arden products.



The cold storage unit and dairy barn during a winter.

Then there was the Bridgeport Creamery, a stand-alone dairy, mostly known to locals as the Milk Ranch. Owned by a Nevada rancher, it was located in a small meadow near the cemetery. It had a dairy barn, corral, and a spring that flowed the entire year. It wasn't in use during the early 1940s and there was no mention of it in newspapers before then. Its origin and history is unknown, and those who might have provided information have passed on.

The land surrounding the meadow was of interest to the Paiute Indian tribe because of multiple Native burial sites in the area.

Native elders had once irrigated the meadow, and old trenches are still visible. Quicksand had been present at one time and children were told to be careful when playing there. In the 1880s an old Indian Poohaguma (medicine man) named Wodziwob held a meeting on the hillside and performed a levitation display.



Bud Chapman in 1952.

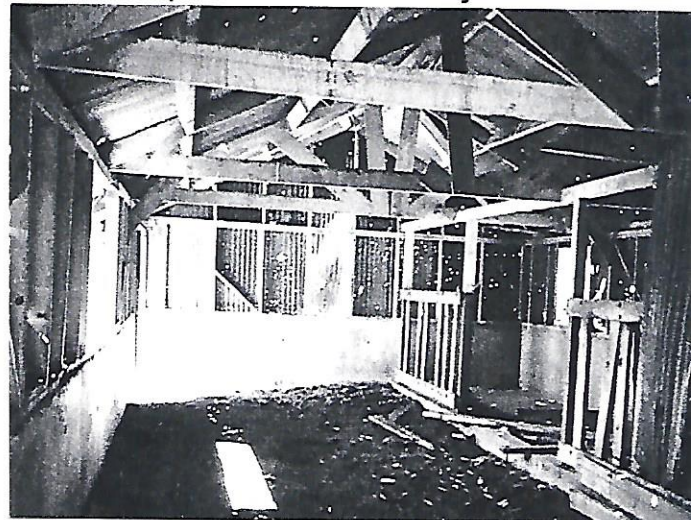
In 1944 plumber-pipe fitter Gilbert "Bud" Chapman entered the picture. He was born in 1911 and raised in Pasadena. In the early 1930s he moved to June Lake with his parents. In 1935 Bud was badly injured in an auto accident in which his mother died. He went back to Pasadena in 1936 and married his childhood sweetheart, Helen Modt. Their first born was son Lloyd in 1938, then daughter Carolyn in 1939, and son Charles in 1949.

Bud tried to enlist in the Armed Forces during World War II but he was declared 4F because of injuries sustained in the 1935 accident. He contributed to the war effort by constructing buildings from San Diego to Richmond. In 1942 he was a plumber at the Hot Creek Fish Hatchery south of Lee Vining. Bud found additional employment in San Diego, Goleta, Oakland and then returned to the Eastern Sierra in 1944 to work at the Mono Lake Dairy in Lee Vining.

Helen had a lifetime teaching credential and taught at Lee Vining High School. The family was then living on the Cain Ranch on the north end of the June Lake Loop. While Bud was working in Lee Vining he became aware of the empty Bridgeport dairy barn and was interested in running a dairy himself. He applied for a Cattle Brand Registration from the California Department of Agriculture and was issued brand "25" that was approved for use in both Mono and Inyo Counties. In 1945 Bud rented or leased the Bridgeport property and stocked supplies to start operations in early 1946. He named the new enterprise the Two-Bit Dairy.

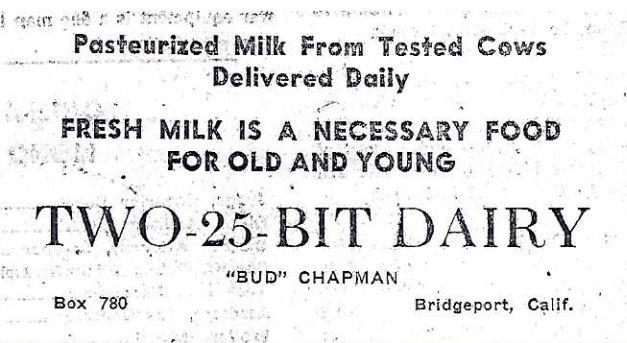
The Chapman's lived for a while near the dairy barn in a large tent mounted on a wooden platform. It contained a 4-burner wood stove, beds and some furniture. Bud later moved a house in but the family still had no running water, bathroom, or electricity. The outhouse was about 100 yards away. The dairy had a cold storage unit, and the spring had sufficient water to operate the equipment. In addition to cows, there were some horses, pigs, chickens, a dog and a pet lamb.

On December 21, 1946 the California Dairyman newspaper reported Bud was operating the Two-Bit Dairy, the only dairyman in the Bridgeport Valley. He hand-milked ten cows, bottled the raw milk and delivered it to homes and businesses. The primary focus of the operation in 1946 was to deliver milk just to Bridgeport residents, but between 1947 and 1948 Bud began making deliveries to Coleville on the north and Mammoth Lakes on the south. It was a time-consuming process because the cows had to be milked twice daily, and the bottles had to be washed, filled, capped and delivered. Bud needed help but could not afford to hire someone because of the small profits.



The dairy barn stalls in 1998.

California State Inspectors made their rounds to the dairy about every six months. In early 1947 Bud was advised he would be required to pasteurize his milk before bottling, adding to the already busy routine. He bought a generator to provide electricity for the process and to power the house, but keeping a supply of gasoline on hand added considerable expense.



Newspaper ad in 1947.

Helen began teaching at the Bridgeport Elementary School in 1947. The Chapman's provided exposure to their business by placing ads in the Bridgeport Chronicle Union and by getting involved in local social events. On June 13 the newspaper reported that Helen attended a bridge party at the home of Mrs. Cecil Thorington, wife of the Mono County Sheriff. In March of 1948 the Chapman's hosted an open house at the dairy and invited the entire town. On the day of the event a family came to town looking for a meal and were directed to the dairy, where they were fed. Open houses were the norm in Bridgeport on Christmas and New Years Eve .

During the spring, ranchers drove their cattle from Nevada into the Bridgeport Valley to graze, and drove them back in the fall to spend the winter. On several occasions Bud helped drive the cattle and horses to Nevada. Helen was cooking at the Strosnider Ranch (Point Ranch) during the branding days. Her son Lloyd gathered calves to be branded until he was kicked in the face by a calf too big for him to handle.

Lloyd had a pet lamb named Guffus, a pest who followed him everywhere. Whenever the door to the house was opened Guffus would be the first one inside to make himself at home on one of the beds and leave unwanted deposits. Guffus wore out his welcome after he jumped through a window at a friend's house, breaking the glass.

One state inspection was during a winter when Bridgeport was brutally cold and Helen was cleaning the barn windows. She sprayed the windows with water which immediately froze and she scraped the ice with a razor blade. The inspector made his rounds and when he completed his report he wrote that the dairy barn windows should be washed.

The next time the inspector arrived Bud told him to leave the premises and to make sure he closed the two gates on his way out. In town the inspector ran into Helen, who was delivering milk to a restaurant. She was abrupt with the inspector and he followed her back to the dairy to determine what was wrong. Helen told him why she was upset and the inspector explained he had a job to do and could not file a blank report. He suggested they leave a dirty milk can in an obvious place so he could report it and told them to wash the can after he left.

Taking care of stock created unique problems. After one of the cows gave birth to a calf, Bud separated the two, but as he pulled the calf toward the barn, the mother attacked him. As Helen approached the cow it turned on her and flipped her about five feet into the air. Fortunately she wasn't injured and Bud got the calf into the barn without further incident.



Lloyd & Guffus, 1948.

Another time some sheep were grazing in the pasture, chewing the grass close to the ground, leaving less feed for the cows. When Helen and the children removed them, the sheepherder arrived on the scene with a large rock in his hand and accused them of stealing his flock.



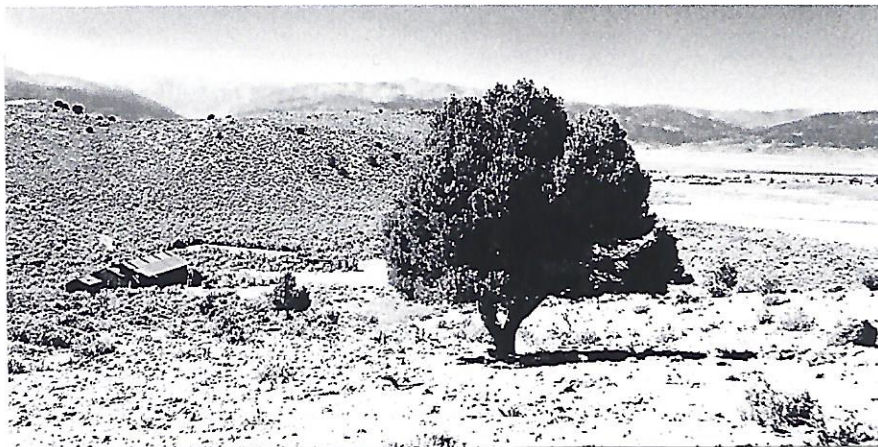
Helen in the 1960s.

Helen was so angry that she went to town, and out of character, went to Patty Cain's bar and ordered a straight shot of whiskey. Bud arrived and learned of the incident. He let it be known that the sheepherder should not show his face in town or there would be an unpleasant reckoning. The problem resolved itself once the herder and the sheep disappeared.

The dairy was unprofitable and the Chapman's decided to close the business in late 1948 after Helen became pregnant with their son Charles. Bud found work in Reno as a plumber, but since Helen was still teaching, she and the children stayed behind in Bridgeport for a while.

The winter of 1948-1949 was a challenge for the town as well as Helen. The water pipes in the entire town froze with temperatures down to minus 47 degrees. Pipes at the Mono County Hospital and Mono County Courthouse were thawed first. The school pipes were also frozen, so Helen and the children filled milk cans with water and took them to school to provide water for drinking and to flush toilets. Helen was three or four months pregnant at the time. Bud returned from Reno on a weekend to thaw pipes and to help make repairs.

In February 1949 the Bridgeport Chronicle Union reported that Helen and the children went to Reno to spend the weekend with Bud. By the middle of March they were all living in Reno but came back to Bridgeport once for a weekend visit. The Chapman's remained in Reno through 1950 and then moved on to other parts of California. The dairy remained closed after they left, but the barn is still standing, leaving a mystery of sorts and a reminder of different times.



The old dairy overlooking the town of Bridgeport.

#### SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND PHOTOS

Lloyd Chapman, Rancho Cucamonga, CA - Mono County Museum Files, Bridgeport  
Bridgeport Chronicle Union Newspaper - Joseph Lent, Bridgeport Indian Colony  
Mono County Assessor's Office, Bridgeport

## **PASSINGS**

### **PHILIP LEE MYERS**

**June 11, 1937 – December 11, 2022**

Phil was born in Fullerton, California and was known as Lee in his early years. He attended USC and Cal State Fullerton, earning a degree in education and geology. He met Mary Nora O'Connell from Vermont when he studied at New England College and they married in 1960. Between 1961-1971 Phil taught in the La Mirada School District while Mary delivered daughters, Marachal, Donica, Erinn and Tiara. They moved to Bridgeport in 1971 and he taught 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades at Bridgeport Elementary. Phil bought the Walker River Lodge in 1972, followed by the Silver Maple and the Cain House in 1988. He co-owned the Restaurant 1881 with daughter Erinn. Phil and Mary retired in 1995 and traveled. When Mary passed in 2006 he took time off by himself. In 2014 he married high school friend, Barbara "Barbie" Flisik.

### **MICHAEL PAUL MONTGOMERY**

**April 8, 1946 – December 26, 2022**

Mike was born in Long Beach, California. He was married to Jackie Montgomery for 32 years and had two daughters, Charlene and Deborah. In 1972 they moved to Bridgeport and Mike bought Hank & Ray's Trailer Rentals and operated Bridgeport Mobil and Bridgeport Towing. Mike was a hard worker but found time to find humor in everything. Mike was a storyteller of tall tales that never failed to bust people up. He liked to deep-sea fish, trap shoot, ride his Harley, travel, play golf and teach youngsters to hunt and shoot. Mike firmly believed, "It's five o'clock somewhere"! Jackie passed in 1998. In 2003 Mike married Gretchen Sam and helped to raise her son, Brandon. Mike and Gretchen were together 19 years.

### **GORDON COURTNEY**

**July 27, 1960 – January 25, 2023**

Gordon was born in Lynwood, California and moved to Bridgeport as a toddler. He was passionate about fishing and was a licensed fishing guide. Gordon was a good cook and collected guitars, which he played for friends. He loved Star Wars and his living room was filled with collectibles. Gordon was happiest while riding his motorcycle and he was a lifelong Chargers fan. He was active in management of the Sportsmen's Bar & Grill, taking pride in it and hosting memorable Halloween parties. He became the owner after his mother's passing in 2019. Gordon was a Volunteer Fire Fighter and saved the life of one of the locals in 1996. During slow winter months, Gordon would pack up his belongings and spend time on San Diego beaches and visit Disneyland. Gordon is survived by daughter Destiny, two grandchildren and his sister, Debbie Courtney-Parisi.

### **MARTIN STRELNECK**

**July 27, 1936 – June 8, 2023**

Marty was born in Eugene, Oregon, but moved to Baldwin Park and graduated from high school. He was a police officer for the Azusa Police Department and became a Mono County Sheriff's Deputy in 1963. Marty and his wife Beth lived in June Lake and managed the Birch Creek Cabins. They moved to Lee Vining in 1972 to raise their sons. Marty was appointed Sheriff-Coroner in 1976 and was elected in 1978. He lost re-election in 1982 but ran again in 1986 and easily won. In 1982 Marty began reporting police news for area newspapers which lead to a weekly column in the Western Outdoor News that he wrote for nearly 30 years. It focused on Eastern Sierra waters, fisheries management and fishing in general. He retired in 1994 to spend time with granddaughters Isabel and Rose, to travel with Beth and to help at fundraising activities. Marty and Beth had been married 56 years when she died in 2013. He is survived by sons David and Eric. A third son, John, died in 1974 at age 3 from a viral infection. Those who knew Marty valued him as a friend.

## KENNY AUGUST

October 19, 1937 – July 7, 2023

Kenny was a Native Paiute, the son of noted basket weaver Rosie August. He was raised in Bridgeport and attended Bridgeport Elementary School. Kenny was known as a kind, friendly man and worked many years for the U.S. Forest Service from which he retired. He was buried in the Bridgeport Cemetery.

## MONO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

In 2024 the museum will be open May 25 through September 30, Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-4pm. Admissions: Adults/\$3.00, Seniors 55+/\$2.00, Children 6-17/\$1.00. Children under six are free. (Note the change in hours and admissions). The Museum Docent is Pam Haas-Duhart. Museum telephone: 760-932-5281. Website: [www.monocomuseum.org](http://www.monocomuseum.org).

The MCHS 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.

---

\*\*\* If you are interested in receiving your annual newsletter online, please furnish your email address on the coupon below, or send to [sweetwater2@schat.net](mailto:sweetwater2@schat.net). This will help to eliminate the cost of mailing via USPS. Thank you.

---

## MEMBERSHIPS AND DONATIONS

\_\_\_\$10.00 Individual \_\_\_\$15.00 Family \_\_\_\$25.00 Sustaining \_\_\_\$50.00 Organization/Business  
\_\_\_\$100.00 Life \_\_\_\$500.00 Patron \_\_\_Donation\_\_\_\_\_

NAME\_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS\_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL\_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to MCHS. Mail coupon and remittance to PO Box 417, Bridgeport, CA 93517.