
***The Old Stagedriver's Yosemite Yarns* (1962) by Laurence Degnan and Douglass Hubbard**

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- McCauley's Chicken
- The Rattlesnake Tree
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THE OLD STAGEDRIVER'S YOSEMITE YARNS



LAURENCE DEGNAN • DOUGLASS HUBBARD

Cover with stagedriver Eddie Webb

About the Authors

Laurence V. Degnan was born February 14, 1884. He is the son of Yosemite pioneers John and Bridget Degnan. In the 1890s his parents established a family-ran bakery in the Old Upper Village in Yosemite Valley. The family moved their deli to the new Yosemite Village in 1956. The new A-frame building bankrupted their family business and they sold the business to the Yosemite Park and Curry Company in 1974. Laurence Degnan died in San Francisco August 13, 1963. For more information, see "Degnan Bakery" and "John Degnan Bakery and Store," in *One Hundred Years in Yosemite* (1947) by Carl P. Russell.

For biographies about Douglass Hubbard, see

- John Bingaman, *Guardians of the Yosemite* (1961), p. 114.
- Allan Shields, (PDF) "Whatever Happend to Doug Hubbard," *Yosemite Association* (Spring 2003), pp. 8-11.

Bibliographical Information

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—Dan Anderson, www.yosemite.ca.us

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By
Laurence Degnan

and
Douglass Hubbard

Illustrated by
Ed Vella

COVER: STAGEDRIVER EDDIE WEBB
SWAPS YARNS WITH A YOUNG ADMIRER
AT YOSEMITE'S PIONEER HISTORY CENTER.

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HOW THE FIREFALL BEGAN



THE OLD stagecoach driver pointed his pipe at the wisp of smoke rising from Glacier Point. “See that smoke? They’re gettin’ ready for tonight’s firefall. Takes a couple of hours for the fir bark to burn down to embers they can shove over. Want to know how it all got started? Well, nobody remembers for sure but here’s one interestin’ possibility.

“Quite a few years ago, back in the 1870’s, a feller named James McCauley built a hotel (which they’re still usin’) up there on Glacier Point. So’s folks could get up there from Yosemite Valley he and John Conway built the Four Mile Trail. Things were goin’ fine but one night somethin’ went wrong. McCauley had made a blazin’ camp fire out on the point but his guests got cold or didn’t show up for some reason. At any rate it made old Jim pretty sore, after goin’ to all that trouble. Without thinkin’ much he kicked the fire over the cliff.

“Some campers here in the valley happened to be lookin’ up and they saw the burnin’ logs tumblin’ and cascadin’ down the cliff. Later some of them told McCauley what a pretty sight it was and begged him to do it again. Jim saw some possibilities, havin’ an eye for business. When there were folks in the valley he or one of his boys would come down the Four Mile Trail to see if the campers wanted a “private” firefall. If some did they would puff back up and get things ready.

“They had some humdingers, too, with great big burnin’ logs and gunnysacks soaked in kerosene. Now and then just to liven things up a bit they would lower dynamite bombs over the cliff. The McCauley twins, John and Fred, got to keep the money they collected, but they worked hard for it!

“Later on, after David and ‘Mother’ Curry started the Curry Campin’ Company in 1899 Mr. Curry used to call up to the point—he had a powerful voice—‘Let the fire fall!’ and over she’d come. The Yosemite Park and Curry Company’s been doin’ it almost every summer since though the old folks have all been gone for a long time now.”

MCCAULEY’S CHICKEN





DID YOU EVER hear the story about McCauley's famous chicken?" As he spoke the driver pulled a faded newspaper clipping from his pocket. "I can't tell the story half as well as Derrick Dodd. He was a writer on the San Francisco Post and a first class yarn-spinner. This is what he had to say about looking down from Glacier Point back in 1882:

'It is something to stop the beating of a chamois' heart to lean over the iron railing set between two verge-topping boulders on the peak's brink, and glance down into the bottomless, awful gulf below. It causes spiders of ice to crawl down one's spine, and the hair of one of the party, whose hat happened to be off, as he bent over the rail, suggested an actor pulling the string of a "fright wig" in a minstrel ghost scene.

As a part of the usual programme, we experimented as to the time taken by different objects in reaching the bottom of the cliff. An ordinary stone tossed over remained in sight an incredibly long time, but finally vanished somewhere about the middle distance. A handkerchief with a stone tied in the corner, was visible perhaps a thousand feet deeper, but even a large empty box watched by a field glass could not be traced to its concussion with the valley floor. Finally the landlord appeared on the scene, carrying an antique hen under his arm. This, in spite of the terrified ejaculations and entreaties of the ladies, he deliberately threw over the cliff's edge. A rooster might have gone thus to his doom in stoic silence but the sex of this unfortunate bird asserted itself the moment it started on its awful journey into space. With an ear-piercing cackle that grew gradually fainter as it fell, the poor creature shot downward, now beating the air with ineffectual wings, and now frantically clawing at the very wind, that slanted her first this way and then that, the hapless fowl shot down, down, until it became a mere fluff of feathers no larger than a quail. Then it dwindled to a wren's size, disappeared, then again dotted the sight a moment as a pin's point, and then—it was gone.

After drawing a long breath all round, the women folks pitched into the hen's owner with redoubled zest. But the genial McCauley shook his head knowingly, and replied: "Don't be alarmed about that chicken, ladies. She's used to it. She goes over that cliff every day during the season!"

And, sure enough, on our way back we met the old hen about half way up the trail, calmly picking her way home. Then only did we realize that we had been wasting our sympathy on an ironclad spring chicken of the regular Palace Hotel breed."

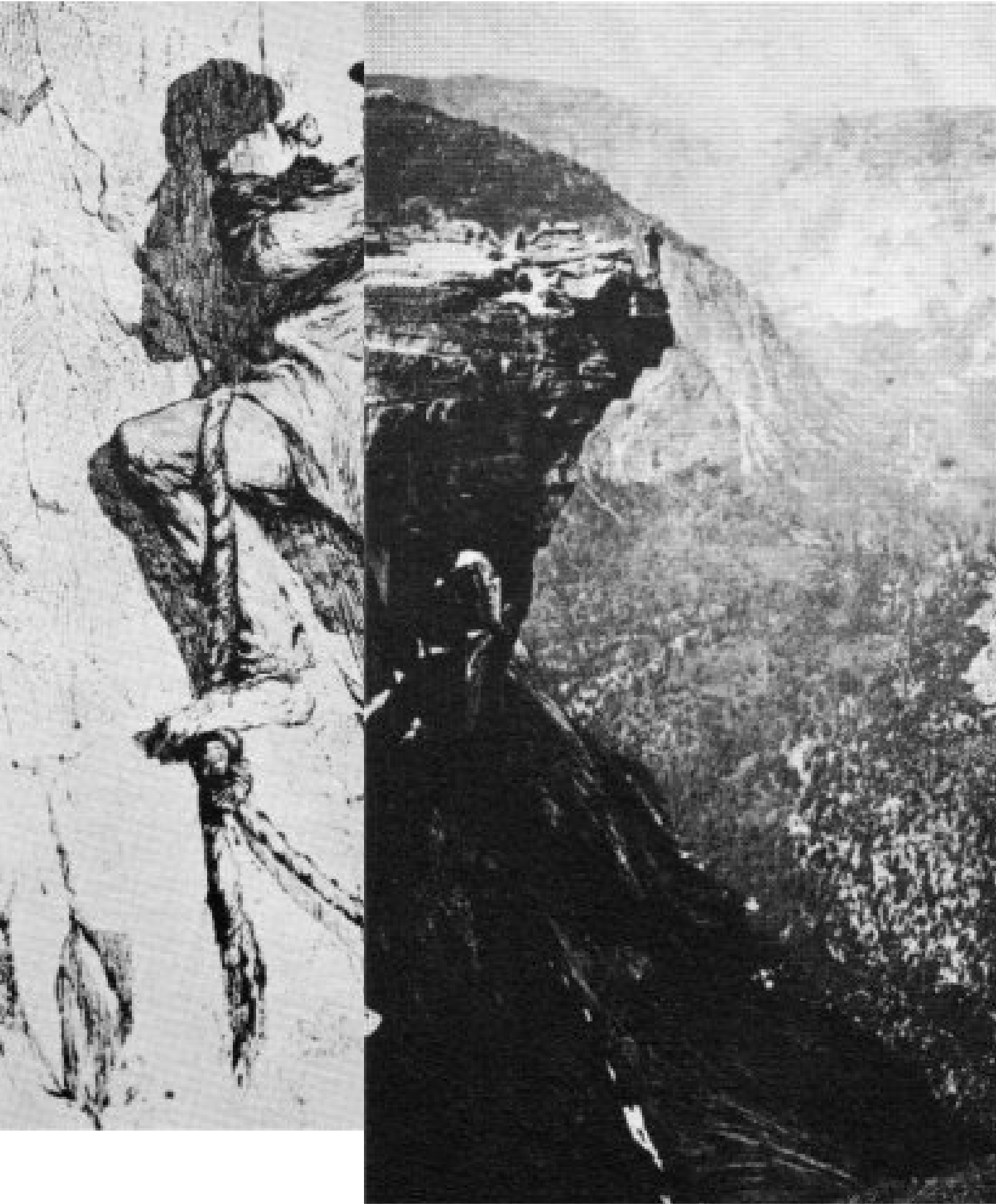
THE RATTLESNAKE TREE



STAGECOACH DRIVERS were a breed all to themselves. Most were gentle and polite but tough as whang-leather. And some of the best story tellers the world has ever known were included in their numbers. Matter of fact, they took pride in tryin' to outdo one another in tellin' the biggest lie. They were so sincere in tellin' these lies that more often than not their passengers swallowed them, hook, line and sinker.

“One favorite story centered around a big old tree which stood up on the Wawona Road near the old Eleven Mile Change Station, not far from what we call Chinquapin today. This old tree had a clump of branches up near the top, and a squirrel had made its nest there. The tree had been hit by lightening, and this left a wide, spiral gosh around it, from top to bottom. Usually a tourist, often the one riding in the shotgun seat beside the driver, would ask what caused the peculiar groove. That was what the drivers would be waitin' for, and they would explain with much arm wavin' how for years a couple of old rattlesnakes had had a nest up in the top of the tree and that they had worn the groove carryin' food up to their little ones!”

THE FIRST CLIMB UP HALF DOME



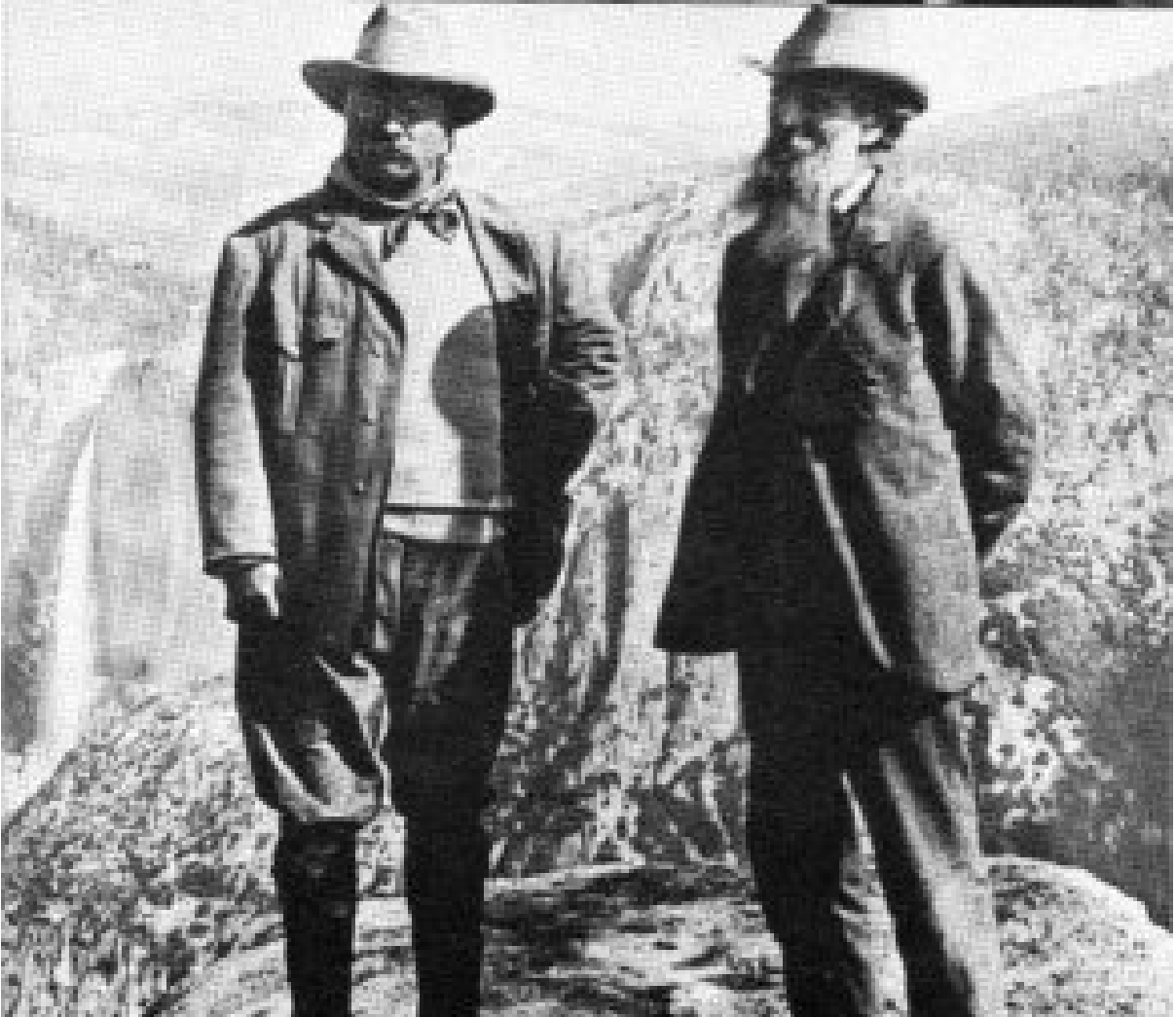
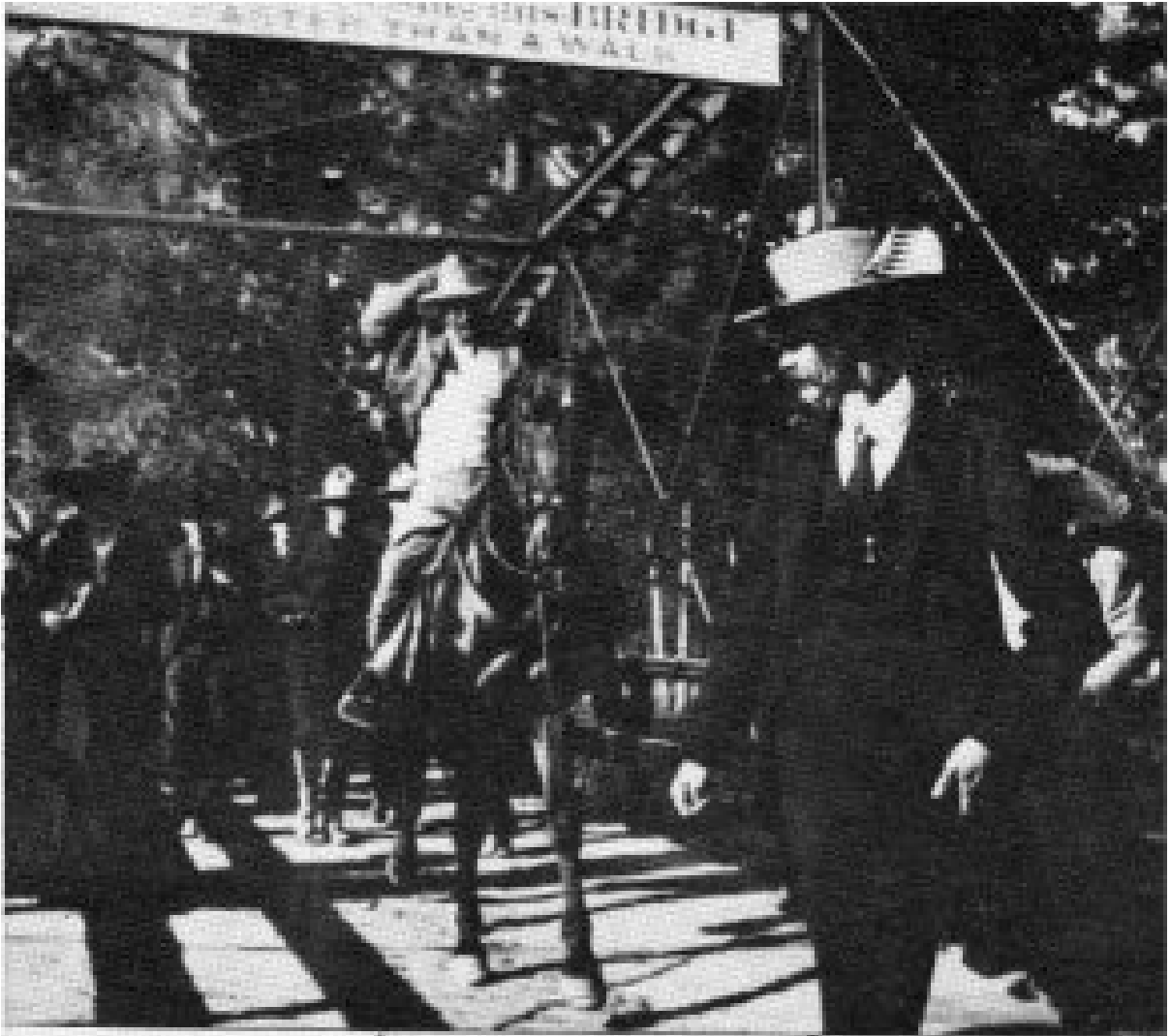
GEORGE ANDERSON ON THE LIP OF HALF DOME,
YOSEMITE VALLEY BELOW.

MOST OF Yosemite's cliffs have been climbed now," said the old stagedriver as he pushed his Stetson back with one thumb— "been up a few myself. But one they said could never be climbed was Half Dome, up yonder. Today there are a couple of sturdy steel cables

to help you up the last thousand feet or so. But when George Anderson's curiosity got the best of him back in 1875 and he decided that he was going to have a look at the top, the rocks on the backside were slick as glass.

“Anderson was a good blacksmith and he had plenty of grit. He forged eyebolts out of iron. Then by drillin' a hole in the rock and drivin' in the bolt, and then threadin' a rope through it, he was able to inch his way up. I say he had grit because it often meant hookin' one big toe over a bolt to help hold him up while he drilled the hole for the next. One slip or loose bolt and he would have gone to his death on the rocks below. Took him about a week to work up to the top but he finally made it. Know what he found on top? A level spot big enough to have a stagecoach race! Captain Anderson's old cabin is out at the Pioneer History Center at Wawona and he's buried in the Pioneer Cemetery, almost in the shadow of Half Dome.”

ROUGH RIDER



THINGS REACHED a fever pitch in Yosemite Valley in 1903 when word came that President Roosevelt was coming. Some fancy preparations were made. John Degan and Commissioner Metson even made some dynamite ‘salutes’ to set off.

“But Teddy had ideas of his own. He had come to talk to John Muir, so the two met at the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees and then sorta sneaked off into the high country with Yosemite’s first two park rangers, Archie Leonard and Charley Leidig. They rode up over Glacier Point and down by Vernal and Nevada Falls. But the president wasn’t interested in socializin’ and when they got to the Old Village in Yosemite Valley Teddy paused just long enough to pay his respects to the people gathered there, then trotted his horse across Sentinel Bridge, commentin’ that he wanted to pitch camp that night in Bridalveil Meadow.

“They tell of one scene that made some of the local folks reach for their handkerchiefs. One little girl, gussied up and pretty as a picture, stood beside the road holding out a bouquet of flowers she had picked for the president. When he looked down and saw her he reined in his horse, dismounted, and picked her up. He said something softly to her, kissed her and was on his way again. Someone said he had just lost a little girl of his own.

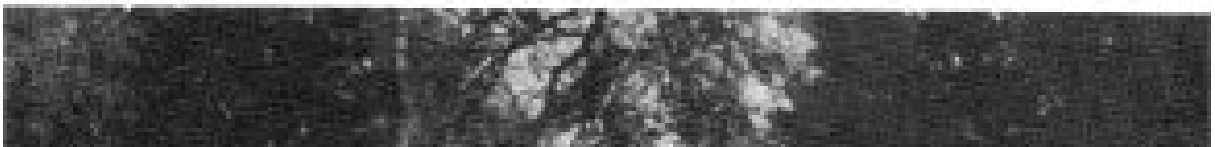
“Well, they camped in Bridalveil Meadow— there’s a sign to mark the spot today. Charley Leidig was sorta chief cook and bottle washer and he said that he spread forty blankets on the ground for the president’s bed. Bet he had a hard time decidin’ where to crawl in!”

TOP: THE PRESIDENT CROSSES SENTINEL BRIDGE

CENTER: ROOSEVELT, MUIR AT GLACIER POINT

BOTTOM: EN ROUTE TO BRIDALVEIL MEADOW

GALEN DUG HIS GRAVE



GALEN CLARK, one of the beloved men of Yosemite, was 42 when he came to Yosemite to die. He had been in the goldfields when the doctors told him that he hadn't long to live— some sort of trouble with his lungs. But Galen was the kind of feller that had to keep busy so while waitin' to meet his maker he got a lot accomplished. He dug his grave (the old timers say it was lined with broken bottles). He carved his name on a granite headstone, then planted some nice young sequoia trees around it. Galen loved trees. He was one of the first to explore the Mariposa Grove, and he built a cozy little cabin in the midst of those great trees.

“After President Lincoln set the Yosemite apart back in 1864, Galen was appointed the first guardian, and he was one of the best guides we ever had. Everyone liked him. He built the original hotel at Wawona, right where the present hotel sits—called it ‘Clark’s Station’. And he started the old covered bridge which you can see out at Wawona today—not many of those left.

“Yosemite’s climate must have agreed with Galen Clark—he was 96 when he passed away in 1910. They laid him to rest right where he wanted to be, in the cemetery in Yosemite Valley. You can see the headstone he carved, and his sequoia trees are doin’ fine too.”

TOP: GALEN AND THE GRIZZLY GIANT

CENTER: CLARK (L) AT CLARK’S STATION, 1866

BOTTOM: YOSEMITE CHILDREN AT GALEN’S GRAVE

ONE DOWN, TWO DOWN



ONE RAINY afternoon in the 1880's John Degan and Martin Sheehan, wearing bright yellow raincoats—we called 'em 'slickers'—were patching holes in the road between the old Stoneman House and Happy Isles in Yosemite Valley. Pretty soon the rain started coming down in bucketfulls so they took shelter under a big old black oak tree.

“A party of tourists was returnin' along the same road from a horseback trip to Nevada Fall. They were strung out along the road, movin' at a pretty good lope, hurryin' to get out of the rain. The first horse shied when he saw the two yellow ghosts looming out of the dark shrubbery, dumping his rider smack dab in the middle of the road. Horse number two and then the third did likewise. Before the men could shed their raincoats and go to the rescue a half-dozen riders, dethroned one by one, were piled up like ragdolls in the road!”

MUSIC OVER THE MOUNTAIN



TELEGRAMS WERE unknown critters in Yosemite in the early days. But in 1872 communications improved quite a bit when Harlow Street and a couple of friends ran a telegraph line into the valley from Sonora. Bill Sell, the first operator, told me that the wire they stretched was salvaged from an old flume, then unstranded and spliced.

“Cyrus Field, president of Western Union, took sick once when he was visitin' in Yosemite Valley. Bill Sell nursed him along and to sorta show his appreciation Mr. Field ordered his people to close all the telegraph switches from Yosemite to New York so Bill could have the pleasure of talkin', with his telegraph key, clean across the country.

“In 1882 The Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company at Tioga ran a telephone line across the crest of the Sierra, from Lundy to Bennettville. They claimed it was the world’s highest telephone. I don’t know quite how they worked it but somehow this line must have been tied in with the one from Lundy to Bodie on one end, and the Yosemite-Bodie Telephone on the other, to make a trans-Sierra hookup, ’cause Jack Leidig told me that it was great sport for the kids in Yosemite Valley to listen on the old hand-crank phone at the Sentinel Hotel to the dance hall music bein’ played in the honky-tonks clear across the mountains in Bodie.”

THE SHOOTING OF DICK WHORTON



LEONIDAS G. WHORTON was a pretty important person in Yosemite Valley in the early days. He was Justice of the Peace and often was Grand Marshal in the local parades. His friends all called him “Dick”. On April 4, 1887 Abel Mann shot and killed him at Dick’s house at Cascades, a few miles below the Valley.

“Bad blood between the men began with the Civil War, then flared up when Mann married Mattie Atkins, a cousin or some sort of kin of Whorton’s, with whom he had been living. Charley Leidig, ridin’ down with the mail saw Dick lyin’ dead in the dirt in front of his house. After the shootin’ Mann took off up the hill but ran into Jim McCauley, who talked him into turnin’ himself in to the sheriff. They tried him for murder down in Marposa. The jury called it self defense though some folks said that Whorton was shot from

behind. Doc Gallison took Dick's skull down so the jury could see the bullet holes so we don't know whether all of him is there in the cemetery in Yosemite or not.

"After he was acquitted Abel and Mattie moved to Raymond. One day they had a fight and he cut her throat from ear to ear. She didn't die but this time he did. The posse chasin' him said he shot himself as they were closin' in on him. Funny thing, though — all the broken glass from the windows of the cabin was on the inside of the cabin!"

FROST'S RED WHISKERS



ONE SUMMER DAY about the turn of the century Henry Frost, the Yosemite butcher, decided that he was tired of his white whiskers. A drinkin' pal by the name of Zickafoos cooperated with enthusiasm by painting 'em red with tough, weatherproof barn paint. Frost repented the next morning, but the harder he scrubbed, first with soap, then kerosene, and finally turpentine, the brighter and redder his whiskers seemed to get. Walking down the road a while later Frost caught one of his friends turning around for a second gape. He was pretty indignant and wanted to know what the feller thought he was starin' at!"

LET'S NOT BE HASTY!



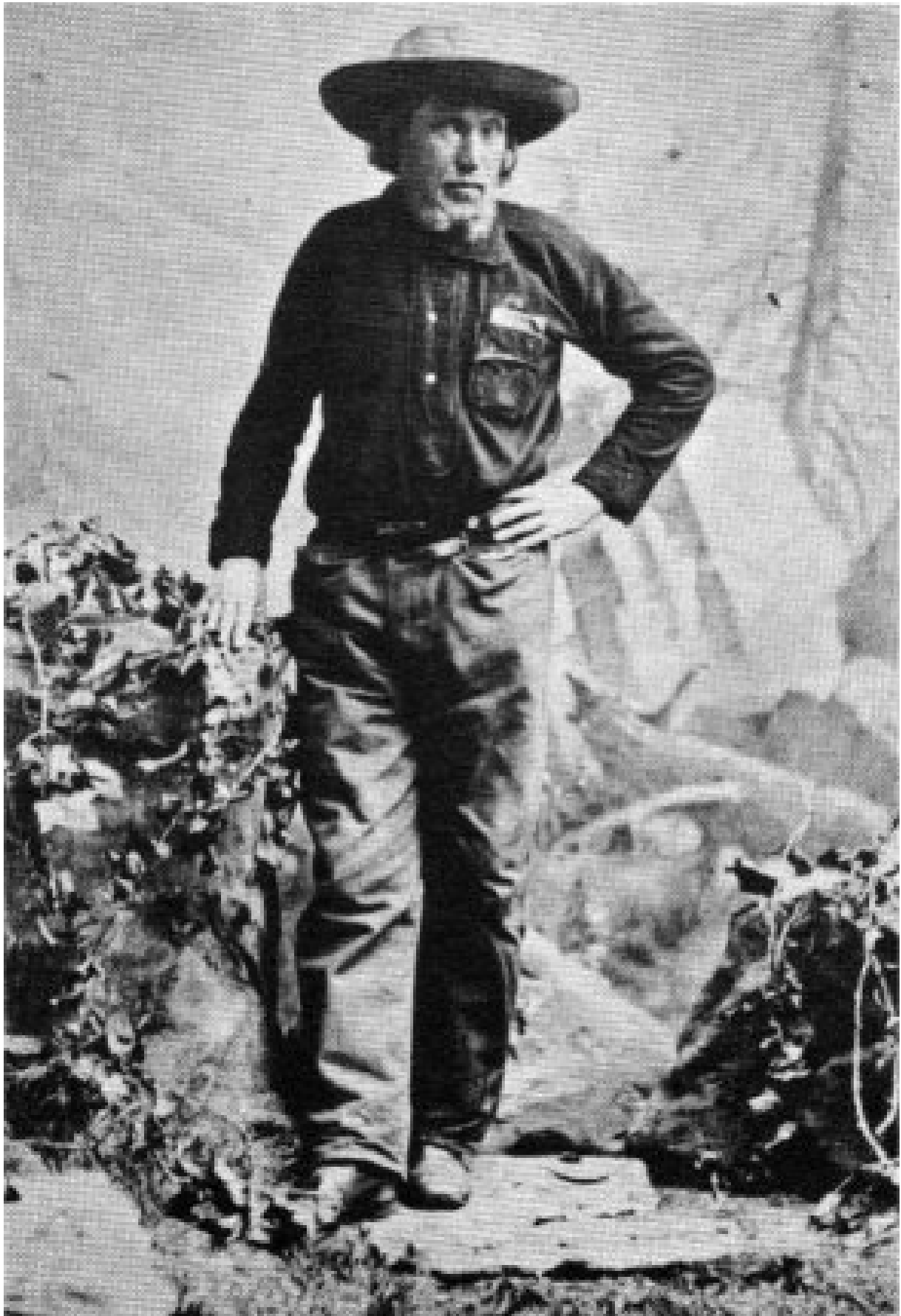
ANOTHER DAY our friend Frost (yep, sorry to say he'd been drinkin' again) decided that life was not worth living. He begged his friend John Baptista Baccigalupi—everyone called him 'Bat'—to shoot him. Bat obediently took up his old Winchester and called out in businesslike tones, 'All right, where do you want me to shoot you? Shall I blow your head off, or put a hole in your belly?' Frost hesitated a moment and then said, 'I guess there's no hurry. Let's wait 'till morning.'"

PIKE



ONE OF THE most popular of the Yosemite guides was Nathan Phillips—everybody called him “Pike”. When he was a youngster back in Tennessee he had diphtheria or somethin’ of the sort which had left his voice so that he couldn’t speak above a hoarse whisper.

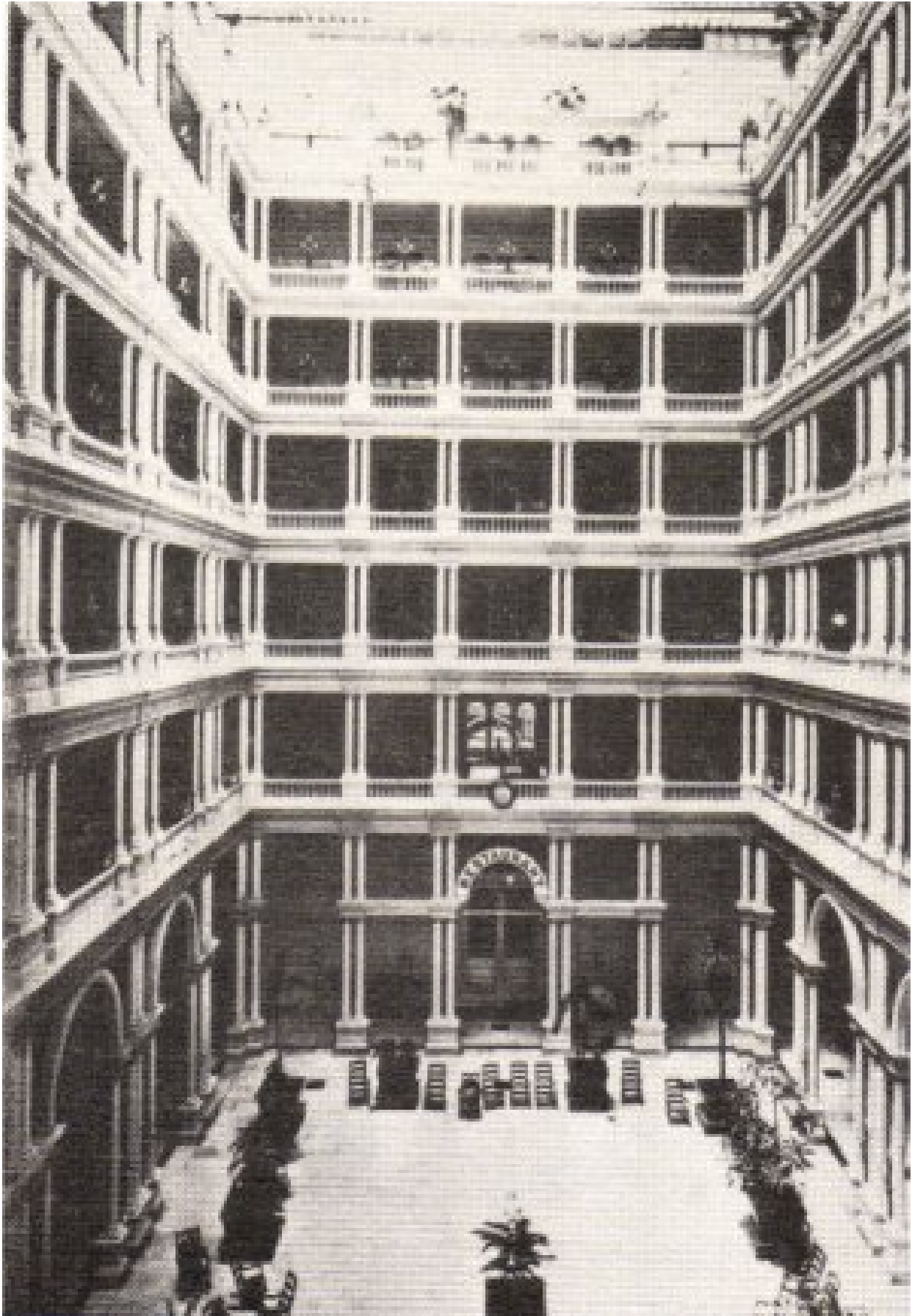
“Pike was always polite and respectful but never above puttin’ someone in his place when the situation called for it. One day he was takin’ a tourist party from the old Sentinel Hotel in Yosemite Valley up the Four Mile Trail to Glacier Point. In those days the ladies rode side-saddles even over the roughest trails. One old gal in particular was rather snooty, all dressed up in fancy duds. During a rest stop at Union Point she called out sorta sharply to Pike: ‘Guide, there is something wrong with this stirrup; it hurts my foot.’ Pike sauntered up to her horse, examined the stirrup carefully, then announced in his guttural whisper, ‘There’s nothing wrong with the stirrup—yer Burned foot’s just too big!’



“Seems a lot of jokes used to center around English tourists. Don’t know just why it was this way unless it was because of the funny duds they wore. One day an Englishman tried to get Pike to take him out to hunt grizzly bears. But Pike would have no part of it. The visitor was persistent — so was Pike. Exasperated, the Englishman finally demanded an explanation, so Pike told him:

Seems that Pike once guided a gentleman from London on a grizzly hunt. This gent was armed with the latest in repeatin’ rifles while Pike had an old single shot. ‘Twasn’t long until they saw a grizzly. Pike raised his rifle and fired, but only creased Old Bruin—made him mad as a hornet. The Englishman, instead of shootin’, tossed down his rifle and climbed like a squirrel up the closest tree. As the old bear charged, Pike had just time to throw himself down flat on the ground and play dead. Someone had told him that a grizzly wouldn’t touch a dead man. But his spine froze as the huge bear approached, huffin’ and puffin’. Old Bruin sniffed him from head to foot, then rolled him over with one great paw. Just as he was expectin’ to have his neck

snapped by the powerful jaws the old bear put his nose down close and whispered in his ear, 'Pike, remember this: don't ever go huntin' with a bloody Englishman!'



THE COURT, PALACE HOTEL, SAN FRANCISCO

“Ladies in distress were a common occurrence to Pike. He always wore a big hat, and it was useful for more things than carryin’ water to his mule, Brigham. Like I was tellin’ you, the ladies rode sidesaddle back in those days. This meant that the lady had both of her legs on the left side, with her left foot in a single stirrup and her other leg hooked over a horn above it. Her long skirts were draped neatly over all, so for all practical purposes the lady had no legs. On another saddle party Pike was guidin’, the group stopped for a rest and to take in the view. One impatient young lady started to dismount by herself. She reached the ground all right, but her skirts didn’t—they remained hung on the saddle! Turning his bock modestly Pike held up his big hat to hide the young lady while she reorganized herself!

“They buried Pike in the old cemetery at Wawona, just a stone’s throw from the Pioneer History Center. Folks say that this same lady came back years later and put up his headstone, for the ‘only true gentleman’ she had ever met!”



“Sam Miller once took Pike to see San Francisco. Put him up at the old Palace Hotel, which was one of the world’s swankiest before the Great Fire. Pike wasn’t used to such fancy campin’ but he didn’t say much as the bellman took him up the elevator to his room. As he left he told Pike to ring if he needed anything. In about two minutes Pike rang. When the bellman returned Pike said, ‘Can you get me an axe?’ ‘I think so, but why do you need an axe?’ Pike replied, ‘I want to blaze a trail so’s I can find my way outa this durned place!’”

SHADOW SHOWS



UPPER HOTEL, 1859

HOTELS WERE pretty primitive things in the early days in Yosemite. Folks leavin' the Hutchings House, which stood close to where the Sentinel Bridge is, would often josh with visitors comin' in. They'd tell 'em that if they put up at that particular hotel (and they had no choice) they should watch out for thieves and always be careful to lock their doors. Much to their surprise when they checked in at the hostelry they would find that the rooms were separated by walls made out of thin muslin cloth and that there were no such conveniences as doors!

"They used to have some mighty interestin' shadow shows on those muslin walls until John Muir got enough wood sawed so they could nail up some real walls!"



UP HALF DOME ON TWO APRICOTS



EVERYONE TO his own taste in food, I always say. As for me, I eat pretty hearty when I'm in the mountains, especially if I'm doin' hard work. But I can remember one little old maiden lady from back east who didn't feel that way. She was plum agin' eatin' any sort of food 'ceptin fruit and vegetables. She felt so strongly about it that she tried to convert everyone else ridin' on the stagecoach with her to the same idea.

Lots of Yosemite tourists climbed to the top of Half Dome in those days and she was one of 'em. Nothin' wrong with that 'ceptin' she kept braggin' that all she had for nourishment on the 16-mile trip was two died apricots! Got sorta tiresome about the sixth time you

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heard it. But she got her comeuppance when we got back to where we met the train. We all were eatin' in the railroad dining room. One of the passengers tapped me on the shoulder and pointed. There in the corner sat our little old lady, wolfing down a huge beefsteak!"

JOHNNY BROWN AND THE WATERMELON

JOHNNY BROWN was a full-blooded Yosemite Indian. He was the son of old "Buckshot Bill" Brown, who was raised in Yosemite valley before the white man came.

"One day Johnny was sitting on the porch of the Old Village Store, getting ready to go to work on a huge watermelon. Someone—perhaps it was Julius Boysen, the photographer— stopped to talk to Johnny before going into the store:

'Hello, Johnny. You going to eat all of that big watermelon?'

'Yep', said Johnny, 'me eat 'um.'

'But won't you have a terrible stomach ache?'

'Yep, me gettum stomach ache. But he don't last long.'"



DOWN THE MOUNTAIN IN A GOLD PAN



OLD HANK WILLIAMS, rest his soul, was one of the most popular drivers to ever crack a whip on the Yosemite run. He used to tell a tear-jerkin' tale about the death of his identical twin, Harry.

"Seems the boys were orphaned at an early age and reared apart. Since childhood they had not seen each other. Hank had been drivin' for years on the Yosemite run and Harry had been prospectin' up along the northern Mother Lode. Finally the brothers arranged a meetin'.

"Comin' out at the head of a thousand foot high avalanche scar, Harry saw the dust of his brother's stagecoach, way below. Was he too late? Fearin' he would be and showin' true western resourcefulness he sat down on his miner's gold pan and tobogganed down that chute of loose rock. Seems old Harry understood the law of gravity but plum forgot about the law of friction.

"Tears would come to Hank's eyes whenever he retold the sad experience: 'Yes, sir, all I ever found of my long-lost brother were the copper rivets from his overalls, in the bottom of his red-hot gold pan.'"

FIREWORKS

THE OLD DRIVER chuckled. "We used to have some bang-up celebrations on the Fourth of July. The summer of '97 or '98 the folks living in Yosemite Valley passed the hat and brought in a whole big box full of fireworks—every kind you can think of. The kids were pretty excited by the night of the 4th when everyone gathered over near the meadow near where the little old chapel stands now, to watch the big show.

"The fireworks were all in one big box and Jack Leidig and some others tore the lid off and got ready to start things goin'. They called Frank Lancey over to give them a hand, and that's just what he did. Pickin' up a Roman candle he lit it with his cigar, and then the fun began! The first burst from the Roman candle didn't shoot into the air as it should have done, but dropped smack into the box where the other stuff was. Whambo! Fire started shootin' in every direction and folks was runnin' like scared cats. Then from behind every rock and tree heads started pokin' out to watch the skyrockets go skittering across the meadow, while salutes, cartwheels, firecrackers and colored fire went in every direction! Reckon there never was such a show! Luckily the skyrockets roared alongside rather than into the crowd, or someone might have been hurt. Someone heard one of the kids remark that he never had known the 4th to come and go so fast!"

THE OLD DRIVER chuckled. "We used to have some bang-up celebrations on the Fourth of July. The summer of '97 or '98 the folks living in Yosemite Valley passed the hat and brought in a whole big box full of fireworks—every kind you can think of. The kids were pretty excited by the night of the 4th when everyone gathered over near the meadow near where the little old chapel stands now, to watch the big show.

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THE INJUNS KILLED BOSTON



DOWN CASCADES way about seven or eight miles below Yosemite Valley there's a big rock with a flat side on it. If you take a good look you'll see the outlines of an old fireplace on it. That and a headboard in the cemetery in Yosemite Valley are about all that are left of George Ezra Boston, who used to be tollkeeper on the old Coulterville Road.

"Everybody liked Boston but somehow he got on the wrong side of Piute George, a renegade Indian who was runnin' from the sheriff and holed up not far from Boston's station. One evenin' George was passin' Boston's place with a couple of friends, about supertime. The tollkeeper, bein' a generous gent invited the Indians in to eat with him. This they did and while Boston had his back turned, cleanin' up the dishes, Piute George shot him. Another Indian cut his throat, just to make sure he was dead. Then they set fire to his cabin to hide what they had done.

"O! Piute George really took to the rocks after that. A couple of the local folks finally coaxed him down by sendin' up another Indian and gettin' him drunk. They were staked out and waitin' for him as he came slinkin' along the trail and when he got close one of them let him have it in the backside with both barrels of a shotgun.

"Doesn't seem possible that he lived through it but Mrs. Leidig and some of the Indian women nursed him back to health. I heard they cleaned out his wounds by runnin' long feathers dipped in bear grease through them! He was tried for murder and sent to San Quentin for the rest of his life."

LEMBERT'S MURDER





THE OLD DRIVER cut off a plug of tobacco with his penknife and tucked it carefully into one corner of his cheek. “You ever been up to Tuolumne meadows? “Well, one of the landmarks there is called Lumbert Dome. Now, John Lumbert was what I’d call a real pioneer. He started to homestead those meadows, way up at the top of the Sierra. Built himself a little cabin that’s still standin’, not far from Soda Springs. Used to pass it all the time when I was drivin’ the Great Sierra Wagon Road— that’s what we call the Tioga Road Today.

“I always liked the old boy, though some people were afraid of him because he had long whiskers and a sort of wild look in his eye. Old John tried all sorts of ways of makin’ a living. Herded a flock of those fancy curly-qed sheep—do you call them karakul?—and lost the whole bunch when he didn’t get them down to the foothills in time and got caught in a snowstorm. He was pretty smart, too. The scientific fellers even named a moth after him, cause in his spare time he collected bugs and butterflies and lizards and sold them to colleges.

“But money was his downfall. Word got around that he had \$600 in gold cached away in his little winter cabin near El Portal, and someone murdered poor harmless old John for it. They buried him right beside his cabin and the gold may be right there too. Folks say the killers never found it.”

HOW THE LOCUST TREES CAME



EVER BEEN in Yosemite Valley in autumn? It's one of the prettiest seasons of all." The old stagedriver reminisced, "If you have you've probably noticed that one of the first trees to turn golden yellow is the locust. Well, you can thank old Jack Anderson, 'cause in a way he paid for them with his life.

"Jack was a stagedriver who had the misfortune of being kicked in the head and killed by one of his horses. Old timers say that he was buried over near the foot of the Four Mile Trail, where the first Old Village used to be. They stuck his whip in the ground to mark his grave. It must have been a fresh switch of locust he had cut on the way up, and it took root.

"Anderson's body was buried in a cemetery, but you'll find many parts of Yosemite through the valley where he was buried.

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“Anderson’s body was moved later to the cemetery, but you’ll find locust trees growin’ in many parts of Yosemite Valley. Most of them though are around where his whip was stuck, —where he was first buried.”

HOLDUP!



FARNSWORTH’S STAGE BEING HELD UP ON THE AHWAHNEE GRADE, 1905.
TOP: TELEGRAM SENT BY PASSENGER TO SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER

THE OLD STAGEDRIVER scratched his whiskers with a gnarled finger and said, “Well, seems like I’ve been takin a lot of your time with this yarn-spinnin’ of mine, but let me tell you one more thing before you go. You know, I reckon that there have been more holdups on the Ahwahnee Grade, down a ways below the Wawona Hotel, than any other place in these hills. One lone bandit held up seven stages at one time—waitin’ for each to come around the hairpin turn, then motionin’ it politely into place with his sawed-off shotgun.

“Probably the most agreeable of these road agents was the one who let a lady tourist take his snapshot while he was holdin’ up Walter Farnsworth’s stage. Guess she wanted to have proof for the folks back home that she had been in a real holdup. That feller was a slippery one — tied homemade trackers on his feet so he left tracks like a horse. They found the trackers but never found him.”

“I reckon the most embarassin’ was the time when a robber held up an entire troop of cavalry as they were cornin’ up for summer duty patrolin’ Yosemite National Park. You probably know that the cavalry did that for quite a few years before they had national park rangers. Seems the soldiers had been shootin’ up the little towns in the foothills—they rode their horses all the way from the Presidio in San Francisco—so they took all their ammunition away from them and put it in one of the quartermaster wagons. Imagine their red faces at ridin’ up on the tail end of one of these holdups and not havin’ a cartridge among them. By the time they broke out the ammunition the bandit was over in the next county!

“Well, happy travelin’ to you, and keep your eyes peeled for these bad men I’ve been tellin’ you about!”



NOTES FOR THE HISTORIAN

Like most folk tales, those of Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada have been handed down from person to person and mouth to mouth and the original narrator often cannot be traced. The authors have gone as far back as possible to identify sources; these are listed below. Some tales in this booklet were heard by Mr. Degnan when he was a small boy living in Yosemite before the turn of the century. Others were told Mr. Hubbard during the time he served as Chief Park Naturalist in Yosemite National Park. The Degnan Letters and others listed below are now preserved in the Research Library of the National Park Service’s Yosemite Museum.

LVD - Laurence Degnan; DHH - Douglass Hubbard; YNN - Yosemite Nature Notes

How the Firefall Began: LVD from Jules McCauley, letter of January 24, 1959 to DHH; *Mariposa Gazette*, September 14, 1928.

McCauley’s Chicken: Frank Harrison Gassaway (pseudonym, Derrick Dodd), *Daily Evening Post*, San Francisco, August 12, 1882.

The Rattlesnake Tree: LVD from Johnny White, Wawona driver. LVD to DHH, January 24, 1959. DHH from Harriet Bruce Harris, January 29, 1958.

The First Climb Up Half Dome: Carl P. Russell, 100 Years in Yosemite, Yosemite, 1959. LVD to DHH, January 24, 1959.

Rough Rider: Charles Leidig to Ralph Anderson, YNN May, 1951; Jack Leidig to DHH; LVD to DHH, October 21, 1957.

Galen Dug His Grave: Carl P. Russell, *op. cit.* LVD to DHH October 29, 1957, January 24, 1959.

One Down, Two Down: LVD from father, John Degnan; LVD to DHH, October 27, 1957, January 24, 1959.

Music Over the Mountain: Jack Leidig to DHH. William M. Sell, YNN June 1954.

The Shooting of Dick Whorton: LVD to DHH, October 21, 1957.

Frost's Red Whiskers and *Let's Not Be Hasty*: LVD to DHH, October 21, 1957, January 24, 1959.

Pike: LVD to DHH, October 29, 1957, January 24, 1959; Harriet Bruce Harris to DHH, January 29, 1958.

Shadow Shows: Carl P. Russell, *op. cit.* LVD to DHH, January 24, 1959.

Up Half Dome on Two Dried Apricots: Charles M. Goethe to DHH, November 5, 1958.

Johnny Brown and the Watermelon: LVD from John Degnan. LVD to DHH, October 21, 1957, January 24, 1959.

Down the Mountain in a Gold Pan: Al Sleeper, driver, to Charles M. Goethe to DHH, November 5, 1958.

Fireworks: LVD to DHH, October 21, 1957, January 24, 1959.

The Injuns Killed Boston: *Mariposa Gazette*, August 21, 1875; LVD from Jules McCauley; YNN May 1959.

Lembert's Murder: Jack Leidig to DHH; William E. Colby, YNN September 1949; John V. Ferretti, YNN September 1948.

How the Locust Trees Came: Ralph Anderson from Jack Leidig to DHH; Lloyd Brubaker, LVD, Richard Jackson, YNN May 1959.

Holdup!: Foley's *Yosemite Tourist* reprinted in YNN February 1955; telegram sent to *SF Examiner* by A. G. Vieth Austrian Consul; John C. Shay, *Twenty Years in the Backwoods of California*, Boston, 1923.

PHOTOGRAPHS

The authors are indebted to the photographers, long gone, whose works add much to the interest of this collection of stories. They include: Page 5, Walker. Page 6, top, Katherine Dexter; center, Underwood and Underwood; bottom, Boysen. Page 7, top, Watkins; center, Houseworth; bottom Boysen. Page 12, left, Bradley and Rulofson; right, Fiske. Page 13, Bancroft Library. Page 14, Weed. Page 21, Fiske. Page 23, holdup, Wilkinson; telegram from *SF Examiner*. All photographs are through the courtesy of interested donors or the National Park Service and are now part of the collections of the Yosemite Museum, Yosemite National Park.



RICE MARKLEY, FAMED YOSEMITE DRIVER, MAKES UP TIME

Also From the Awani Press:

Fran Hubbard, *A Day With Tupi, an Indian Boy of the Sierra*

Fran Hubbard, *Animal Friends of the Sierra*

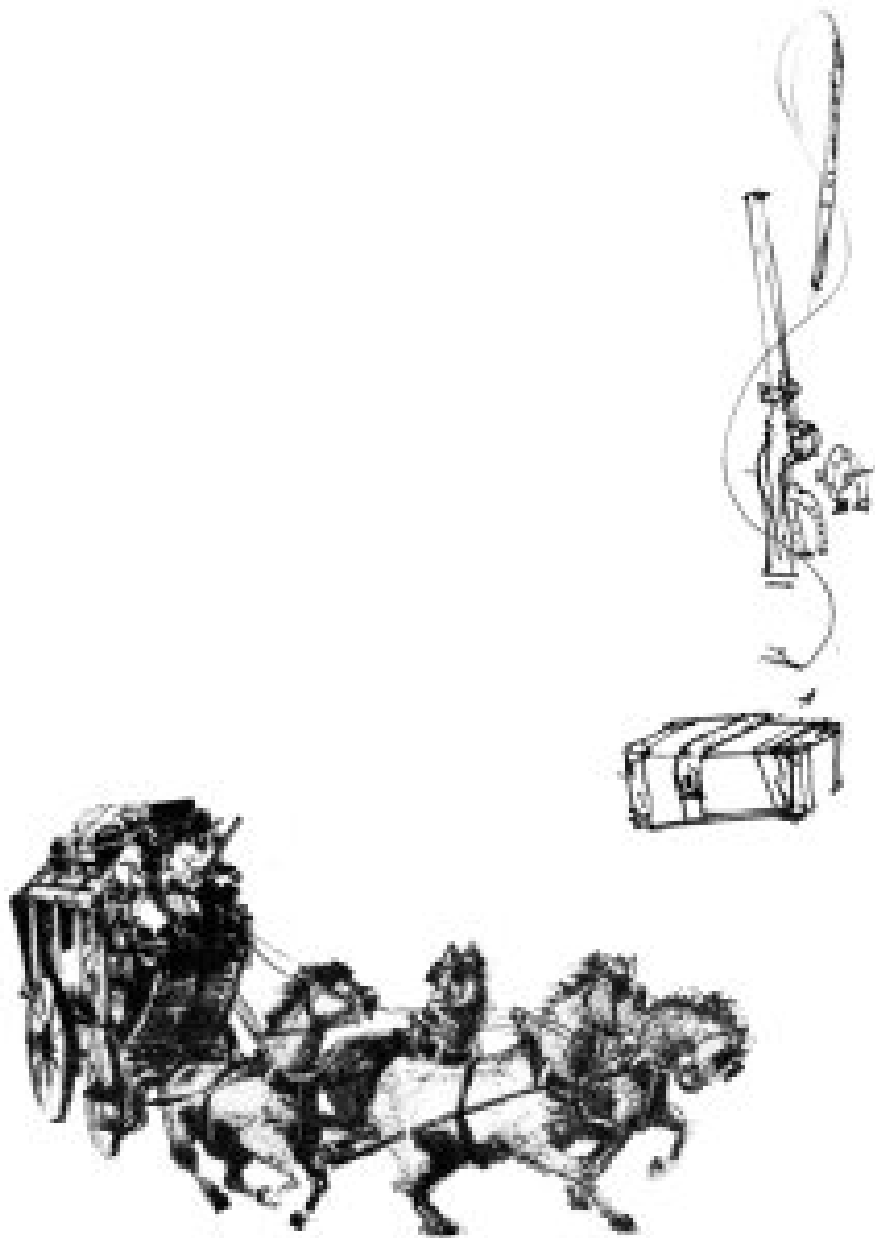
Fran Hubbard, *Animal Friends of the Northwest*

Douglass Hubbard, *Ghost Mines of Yosemite*

Douglass Hubbard, *In Old Virginia City*

Douglass Hubbard, *A National Park Adventure*

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY COURTESY OF THE YOSEMITE MUSEUM, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK



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Dan Anderson