

*Where the ghosts of the past  
mingle with the spirit of tomorrow.*

# Tonopah

Part III

## Claim Jumping Tasker Oddie

Despite the modern 20th century times, there were occasional hectic moments in law-abiding Tonopah. In about 1903 a tough-minded group from Salt Lake City was coveting some ground owned by the Tonopah Mining Company.

Next to a hill or "blow-out" of rock about 30 or 40 feet high, about six or seven of the men were digging a hole and were really making the dirt fly as they spelled one another.

Under Nevada law, to make a valid location it was necessary to have a hole dug at least ten feet deep. These men were trying to jump a portion of the mining company's ground, establishing their own claim by digging a new shaft. The company had neglected to dig holes on some of its properties, and these claim

jumpers spotted the opportunity and moved in on the ground, knowing that the laws were only loosely enforced, anyway.

The mining company was represented by Tasker Oddie. When he saw what was going on, he ran toward the men and jumped into the hole which by then was four or six feet deep. His idea was to block the sinking of shaft to the required depth.

Instantly their guns came out. Though unarmed, Oddie was so intent upon defending his client's rights that he saw no other way of delaying the completion of the shaft.

A few other townspeople heard the commotion and rushed up the slope. They were led by a medium sized man who was quite ordinary looking, a successful marshal in other territories but this time he did not have his guns. The marshal, late of Tombstone, came to Tonopah very early to start the Northern Saloon. He was

good at the Western art of "persuasion."

"This ground belongs to the Tonopah Mining Company. You'll have to get off," said the old law officer quietly but firmly.

"Who says so?" demanded the ringleader of the Salt Lakers.

"I do."

"An' who in the world are You?"

"I'm Wyatt Earp."

"Oh!"

Without further ado the claim jumpers moved out, swiftly and completely. Young Tasker Oddie leaped out of the hole, having won his first case.

The miners worked right through Tonopah's first Christmas. Then on midnight December 31 the tired, dirty leasers ceased their labors and climbed out of the tunnels and drifts to the surface, surrendering their ground. Guns were fired to signal the official quitting time, and then

numerous explosives of every kind were set off on the surrounding foothills. All joined in all night drinking and toasting at the saloons, and the boxlike hurdy gurdys were packed to the door. Some extended the merriment for several days thereafter, while others left for sprees in San Francisco and elsewhere.

Almost all of the leasers had made good wages, and about thirty of them had

earned small fortunes. In the meantime, Butler had sold all of his mining rights to Philadelphians who organized the properties as the Tonopah Mining Company. They took over Butler's group in January 1902, closing the era of leasing development.

At about that same time during the first winter a thirty day long epidemic felled about fifty of Tonopah's brave citizens. Outbound stages were jammed while others walked away or bought small teams to carry away their possessions. The women in the camp nursed and comforted the sick, yet about sixty percent of the 1200 people who had been in Tonopah at the height of leasing operations had

departed. There were similar epidemics two and three years later.

In June 1902 the weekly Tonopah Miner began competing with Booth's one year old newspaper. A two-ton ice plant began deliveries that same month, just in time for the hot summer. There was talk of piping water 32 miles from Peavine Creek, in the Toiyabe Range. Surveys were run. Ultimately the water came from Rye Patch, where 50 wells were dug and a pumping plant installed.

Before summer was over a Presbyterian minister started a Sunday school, and that fall a school opened with 80 pupils. By October there were competing hotels, stores and stage lines.

For weekly news information and the weekly paper distribution locations, contact Gloria Mosely in Tonopah. Call 483-4591.

## SCHOOL DAYS IN HAWTHORNE

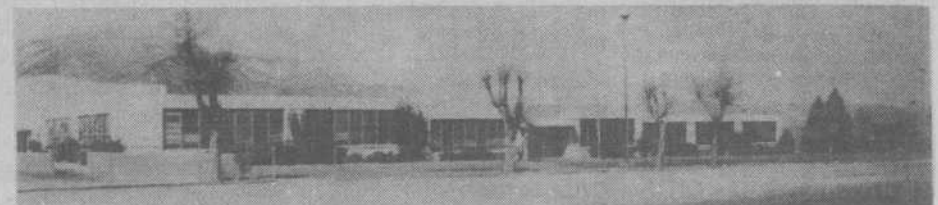
As in all small towns in Nevada, when the kids of school age started to show up, there had to be a school. Hawthorne was no different. Somewhere, somehow, soon after the town was founded in 1881 a school was started, but, like the C&C Railroad which started the town, the records disappeared from the scene.

It must be remembered that in 1881 the public school system was

school building was erected on the north side of sixth Street between C and D Streets and that structure served as a two-room (beginning with one teacher, eventually two) educational center for 50 years. It was not until 1930 that a "library addition" was added, and this became a third classroom when enrollment expanded during the period of construction of the ammunition depot, and the

(The story of the Cotter School was something else. It was a modern, functional, brick building -- steam heated -- that was among the buildings erected when the ammunition depot was established. Only later it was learned the navy had no authority to staff and operate a school.)

In 1936 the voters of the Hawthorne School District decided the town was ready to replace the 50-year old



PORTION OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COMPLEX TODAY

conducted in a more or less hit-and-miss basis. True, the office of superintendent of public instruction was created when Nevada was granted statehood in 1864. But from then until 1955 there was no county-wide school district as known today. Each town, village or hamlet could organize its own school district if it had a minimum of seven pupils and could keep the school open until the enrollment dropped to four.

Hand-me-down reference to the beginning of a school in Hawthorne indicates the first school was located in a building at the southwest corner of Fourth and G Streets (still in existence as a residence that has been occupied by many Hawthorne residents).

About 1886 an actual

budget permitted the hiring of a third teacher.

Although the town showed only a slight gain in population by 1930, the school population did increase, necessitating the hiring of a fourth teacher (two grades for each teacher). Confronted with the problem with having four teachers but only three classrooms, the school district prevailed upon the navy to permit use of the Cotter School building at the ammunition depot so that each teacher would have a classroom and the library room in the "uptown" school could be used for library purposes.

structure on Sixth Street and approved a \$30,000 bond issue to erect a new, modern, frame and stucco building at the same site. That building is in use today, but considerably enlarged during the World War II period, and serves as only one of the several buildings used in the primary-elementary school system.

A larger frame building was constructed on A Street during the war, and a second, larger concrete unit added in 1952. Some time late a complete unit was constructed in Babbitt. All are part of the primary-elementary-junior high complex today.

For information, in Hawthorne, concerning location of the weekly papers for distribution, contact Clarence Banks at 945-2871.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

**McCarran Int'l Airport WILL SELL the following items — all or none — to the highest bidder:**

**2 ea. office trailers 24'x60'  
Minimum bid \$18,000**

The trailers may be inspected by calling 739-5639 or 739-5233. Submit bids with a minimum deposit of 10% (Certified Check) to McCarran Int'l Airport, P.O. Box 11005, Las Vegas, NV 89111, attention S. Were-Bey, C.P.M.

Bids must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "trailers" on or before Nov. 18, 1985. 3:30 PM. Successful bidders shall be responsible for the removal of the trailers within 14 days of notifications.

Unsuccessful bidders' checks shall be returned immediately after the bid opening.