

**Silver Reef's Petrified Forest:
An eggnog inspired tale?**

During the late 1870s, in what has become known as the Pioche Stampede, many silver seekers left Pioche, Nevada. They did so hoping to make fortunes in the newly established Southwestern Utah town of Silver Reef.¹ Though separated by a one-way journey of more than 90 miles, the two mining towns would remain closely connected. Silver Reef would occasionally be referred to as the “Pioche Extension.”² News from Silver Reef was even carried in a special section of the *Pioche Record*, Pioche's locally printed newspaper. Perhaps one of the most fantastic pieces of news to be printed in the *Record* came from Silver Reef and went as follows:

“It is seldom that Dame Fortune bestows her carresses [sic] on people who are worthy of them, yet in the case of Henry Freudenthal and Louis Hassell, it would seem that the old lady had at last come [sic] to her right mind and has been ever so lavish of her favors on two deserving young men. On the 24th, Freudenthal and Hassell, chloriders in the Thompson & McNally, were putting a hole into unusually hard rock, when suddenly the entire face of the drift before them gave way with a looming sound, into a black abyss 200 feet deep. Mr Hassell, who was turning the drill at the time, instantly sprang backward, thereby saving himself from being carried downward with the huge mass of rock. The astonished chloriders realized that an immense cave was before them. Two hundred feet over head, and faintly seen by candle-light, frowned its dome-like ceiling, the further extremity of which was lost in the darkness. Two hundred feet below, firm and upright stood a forrest [sic] of huge trees. Ropes were procured and the chloriders descended into the forest, which was found to be petrified. On some of the trees strange characters were inscribed. Various mosses, also petrifications, appeared green and life-like, covered the ground. All these petrifications carry silver—some of the samples broken from the trees assaying as high as \$200 per ton. Last evening, in company with Judge A. H. Parker, Mining Engineer, we visited the wonderful cave and found its dimensions to be as follows: Length 875 feet, width 75 to 100 feet, height [sic] from the bottom to ceiling or roof, 375 to 400 feet.”³

Had “Dame Fortune” really visited Henry Freudenthal and Louis Hassell inside that dark mine on Christmas Eve? For decades the *Record* article has served as proof of this discovery. Books, including Orson F.

1. Paul Dean Proctor and Morris A. Shirts, *Silver, Sinners and Saints* (Provo, Utah: Paulmar Publishers Inc., 1991), 48.

2. *Ibid.*

3. “Silver Reef News,” *The Pioche Weekly Record* (Pioche, NV), January 1, 1881.

Whitney's *Popular History of Utah*,⁴ various graduate theses,⁵ and the KUED/Lee Groberg documentary *Treasure House: The Utah Mining Story*, all repeat the legend of Silver Reef's petrified forest. Perhaps adding credence to the story is the fact that both Freudenthal and Hassell are listed on U.S. Census records as living in Silver Reef during 1880 (as was mining engineer Adolphus H. Parker).⁶ The Thompson and McNally claims—site of the supposed discovery—were indeed nearby on the White Reef.⁷ At the time of the article, these claims were being worked by “chloriders,” miners who followed thin veins or discontinuous ore deposits hoping to extract silver with the least amount of work possible.⁸ Yet other parts of the story are less believable; including the upright trees upon which “strange characters were inscribed” and the green petrified silver bearing moss.

The truthfulness of this petrified forest story relies upon the creditability of the *Record's* correspondent from Silver Reef. This creditability is cleared up in the subsequent week's edition. In a continuation of the story the correspondent writes:

“In a second cave leading from the first great cave mentioned a week ago, was found a beautiful Indian maiden reclining on a couch of furs in front of a lodge of skins. Close beside her knelt an Indian taking a drink of water from a silvery stream. All were petrified—stream, Indian and maiden. Yet, before we go any further, we owe an explanation in regard to the great discovery. On Christmas night we went to bed with Egg Nog, a congenial partner, who very soon soothed us to sleep with a bad headache. Without doubt Nog had something to do with the construction of the cave of our dream and also of bearing us through the petrified forest to where the maiden was. So excited were we at the time of writing the discovery that we forgot to mention it as a dream. We are under the firm impression, however, that the cave exists, but it hasn't been discovered.”⁹

So it would seem that the *Record's* Silver Reef correspondent got a bit too carried away. Whether it was truly an eggnog inspired dream, or simply a cockamamie story, the truth is no doubt a disappointment to many

4. Orson F. Whitney, *Popular History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1916), 564.

5. See for example: Alfred Bleak Stucki. “A Historical Study of Silver Reef: Southern Utah Mining Town.” (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1966), 67-68. and Paige Margaret Peyton. “The Archeology of Abandonment: Ghost Towns of the American West.” (doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2012), 167-168.

6. 1880 United States Census for Silver Reef, Washington County, Utah. Henry Frudenthal is listed as a 23 year old miner, living with his aunt Margaret Grambs (proprietor of the Cosmopolitan). Louis Hassel is listed as a 32 year old blacksmith from Norway, and Adolphus H. Parker was a 33 year old mining engineer born in England.

7. *Silver, Sinners and Saints*, 188-189.

8. Albert H. Fay, *A Glossary of the Mining and Mineral Industry* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 153. It is believed the name “chloriders” may have originated at Silver Reef, Utah.

9. “Silver Reef News,” *The Pioche Weekly Record* (Pioche, NV), January 8, 1881.

who have heard the legend. By conveniently forgetting to mention the cave as a dream in the first article, the correspondent no doubt caused a sensation, which has continued for some into the present day. For the modern historian some questions are naturally raised while reading the second article. For example have past historians simply not gone to the next issue of the *Record* and thus never found the recantation? Has the legend survived so long because ghost town enthusiasts conveniently forgot the other half of the story? Or was the second article part of a conspiracy ordered by mine bosses to hide the truth? One important note to add is that Silver Reef's own newspaper, the *Silver Reef Miner*, makes no mention of the discovery in its issues of January 5th and 12th of 1881.

Other stories of silver bearing petrified wood are found in the annals of Silver Reef history, and petrified wood is not uncommon in the area. Relatively close by is the Escalante Petrified Forest, a Utah State Park. Locals of the Silver Reef area have found petrified wood, some of which is claimed to have contained silver. But while stories like these may be true, it seems perhaps the legend of a massive cave with a silver bearing petrified forest can at last be put to rest.

THE PIOCHE WEEKLY RECORD

SATURDAY... JANUARY 1, 1881

LOCAL INTELLIGENCE

An individual by the name of Olson, jeweler by trade, a short time ago moved to Pioche from Utah, also bringing a couple of his wives with him, who were mother and daughter. He worked at his trade in town a month or more, but the other morning Mr. Olson turned up missing, likewise several articles that were placed in his hand to be doctored. He took the youngest wife with him, but, by some unaccountable reason, he left behind the old woman. It may appear strange to the wicked people of the outside world that a man should marry a mother and daughter, but it is of frequent occurrence in the blessed land of Utah. We know of instances where men have married widow women with several daughters, with the understanding they should marry the girls as they became old enough, and as the girls got “ripe” the man would marry them, one after the other. It is to be presumed that this was done for the purpose of keeping the girls “in the family.”

Pioche had a visit last week from a genuine tramp; one of the Eastern kind. He frightened nearly all the women in town by his boldness when he called at private residences. Saturday night, about 12 o'clock, this man went to the residence of Deputy Sheriff John Craig, gave the door a tremendous kick and yelled out: “Get up Bill, I want to get in and go to bed.” Mr. Craig got up and opened the door, and the man started off on a run. Craig followed him and captured him in the old hospital building, brought him down to jail and put him in. When the man stepped in jail he bursted out laughing and said: “Didn't I hit the nail on the head.” He informed Craig his profession was “asking alms.” He was kept shoveling snow two days then ordered out of town.

ELECTION AND INSTALLATION.—On Saturday evening last St. John Lodge No. 18, F. & A. M., held their annual election which resulted as follows: W. M., R. H. Elam; S. W., Chas. F. Meyers; J. W., W. P. Goodman; Treasurer, D. C. Clark; Secretary, Geo. T. Gorman; S. D., Jos. A. Behr; J. D., Julius Hoffman; Tyler, E. D. Turner; Stewarts, G. T.

SILVER REEF NEWS.

[For the Pioche Record.]

It is seldom that Dame Fortune bestows her carresses on people who are worthy of them, yet in the case of Henry Freudenthal and Louis Hassell, it would seem that the old lady had at last come to her right mind and has been ever so lavish of her favors on two deserving young men. On the 24th, Freudenthal and Hassell, chloriders in the Thompson & McNally, were putting a hole into unusually hard rock, when suddenly the entire face of the drift before them gave way with a looming sound, into a black abyss 200 feet deep. Mr. Hassell, who was turning the drill at the time, instantly sprang backward, thereby saving himself from being carried downward with the huge mass of rock. The astonished chloriders realized that an immense cave was before them. Two hundred feet over head, and faintly seen by candle-light, frowned its dome-like ceiling, the further extremity of which was lost in the darkness. Two hundred feet below, firm and upright stood a forrest of huge trees. Ropes were procured and the chloriders descended into the forest, which was found to be petrified. On some of the trees strange characters were inscribed. Various mosses, also petrifications, appeared green and life-like, covered the ground. All these petrifications carry silver—some of the samples broken from the trees assaying as high as \$200 per ton. Last evening, in company with Judge A. H. Parker, Mining Engineer, we visited the wonderful cave and found its dimensions to be as follows: Length 875 feet, width 75 to 100 feet, height from the bottom to ceiling or roof, 375 to 400 feet.

Christmas passed off pleasantly. At Cassidy's saloon a magnificent lunch was spread. John Fortman, Hickox & Rafferty, and George Miller, also did a big thing for the boys.

Fred Hatch, in the employ of Lusk & Co., butchers, fell into a cauldron of boiling water. He was terribly scalded and is now lying in a dangerous condition at the hospital.

Amount of bullion shipped for the week ending December 25, as reported through Wells, Fargo & Co., was \$20,562.87.

The grand ball of the Miners' Union takes place New Year's night.

THERE has been an assessment of ten

"Silver Reef News," Pioche Weekly Record, 8 January 1881

THE PIOCHE WEEKLY RECORD.

SATURDAY.....JANUARY 8, 1881

LOCAL INTELLIGENCE.

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS.

The Board of County Commissioners held their regular monthly meeting Monday, January 3d, 1881, as required by law.

Present—D. C. Clark, A. Veitch and J. V. Keeley, members; C. H. Patchen, District Attorney; George T. Gorman, Clerk. D. C. Clark was appointed Chairman for the ensuing two years. The Commissioners then transacted the following business:

The official bonds of R. H. Elam, Treasurer; J. C. Henderson, Recorder; Julius Hoffman, Assessor; W. L. McKee, Sheriff; C. H. Patchen, District Attorney; G. R. Alexander, School Superintendent; J. H. Goodrich, Justice of the Peace of Pioche; E. D. Turner, Constable of Pioche; J. R. Megarrigle, Justice of the Peace of Virgin Township; Eugene Roscoe, Constable of Virgin Township; Louis Sterns, Justice of the Peace of Hiko Township; were presented proper in form and substance, with good and sufficient sureties, and were ordered approved, filed and recorded.

The following bills were approved and allowed:

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| F. W. Clute, error in tax roll..... | \$ 35 00 |
| J. H. Duff, Inspector of election, etc.... | 16 00 |
| M. Barrett, Registry Agent..... | 11 00 |
| J. B. Atchison, Registry Agent..... | 14 75 |
| Goodman & Co., Stationery..... | 54 00 |
| D. A. Fuls, salary..... | 250 00 |
| W. A. Wescoatt, taking testimony..... | 150 00 |
| W. L. McKee, Jailor, etc..... | 59 00 |
| E. F. Morton, salary..... | 150 00 |
| J. Eisenman, salary..... | 150 00 |
| D. C. Clark, salary..... | 150 00 |
| G. R. Alexander, salary..... | 150 00 |
| D. C. Clark, groceries for indigents..... | 54 24 |
| Record Publishing Co., advertising..... | 20 00 |
| C. H. Patchen, salary..... | 375 00 |
| White Pine County, McLane trial..... | 306 25 |
| White Pine County, McLane trial..... | 1,734 80 |
| J. C. Henderson, filing bills and cirt.... | 99 25 |
| W. E. Griffin, safe rent..... | 15 00 |
| W. H. Henderson, mining ass't..... | 50 00 |
| W. H. Henderson, com. on poll-tax..... | 42 00 |
| Western Union Tel. Co..... | 2 00 |
| Wells, Fargo & Co..... | 2 00 |

Board adjourned.

A NARROW ESCAPE.—The town of Pioche on Wednesday night had a narrow escape from an extensive conflagration. About 9:30 o'clock that evening a fire was discovered in the rear portion of the People's Market, located on Meadow Valley street. It appears that during the cold weather it has been the habit to build a large fire in the stove, in the rear room, for the purpose of keeping the beef from freezing during the night, and the fire being too hot, it communicated to the board sides of the building. An alarm was given, but it was fully ten minutes before the fire companies were able to get water on the burning mass, but finally succeeded and extinguished it. The entire rear of the building is burned, and a small portion of the meat in the shop slightly injured. The fire never communicated itself

SILVER REEF NEWS.

[For the Pioche Record.]

The Miners' Union ball was a big success.

Mr. George Rives and Miss Mary Miller were married on New Year's night.

The Christy, Stormont and also the Barbee & Walker are all turning out their usual amount of bullion.

We are sinking a shaft for Poujade, Heintzleman and Parker. Great developments may soon be expected.

Mrs. John H. Cassidy, who for the past three months has been lying in a painful and dangerous illness, inasmuch that her life was despaired of, has now so far recovered as to be able to walk about the house.

Amount of bullion shipped for the week ending January 1, 1881, as reported through Wells, Fargo & Co., was \$12,341.03. Total for December, 1880, \$82,485.29. Total for the year 1880, \$1,096,359.19. Grand total of all bullion shipped from Silver Reef, \$3,800,522.96.

Samuel W. Barnum, an old-time Piocher, recently arrived here from Parowan with a big fiddle and all the rest of his musical paraphernalia. He reports that the chickens' crops of that locality are looking very fat and promising. He also says that he left Parowan for cogent reasons.

A most magnificent wedding and reception occurred on New Year's Eve at the Stormont boarding-house, kept by Mrs. Leyson. By the Rev. A. H. Parker Mr. Joe Poulson and Miss Julia Clauson were duly tied together and then turned loose on the river of married life. All the pretty girls, along with the ugly fellows, of Toquerville were present. The newly married couple were the recipients of many beautiful presents. Parker did the grand thing. He kissed every girl in the room, drank wine, danced, sang, and then retired to his bachelor quarters, with a tear on the end of his nose and a lonely feeling in his bosom.

In a second cave leading from the first great cave mentioned a week ago, was found a beautiful Indian maiden reclining on a couch of furs in front of a lodge of skins. Close beside her knelt an Indian taking a drink of water from a silvery stream. All were petrified—stream, Indian and maiden. Yet, before we go any further, we owe an explanation in regard to the great discovery. On Christmas night we went to bed with Egg Nog, a congenial partner, who very soon soothed us to sleep with a bad headache. Without doubt Nog had something to do with the construction of the cave of our dream and also of bearing us through the petrified forest to where the maiden was. So excited were we at the time of writing the discovery that we forgot to mention it as a dream. We are under the firm impression, however, that the cave exists, but it hasn't been discovered.

Silver Reef, January 3d.