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REILLY:

THE WELL PRESERVED RUINS OF AN 1890's MINING CAMP

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Reilly is certainly one of the Death Valley region's more obscure mining camps. However, this short-lived silver camp situated at the base of the Argus Range just north of the Slate Range Crossing appeared on maps for twenty years. Today Reilly stands out among the other obscure camps of the region because of its unusual combination of easy access and well-preserved ruins. I first stumbled onto Reilly—or Anthony Mill Ruins, as the modern topographic maps (e.g., USGS Matarango Peak, Calif., 15-min. quad., 1951) call the place—while working for the Bureau of Land Management in 1978. I was impressed not only by the mill foundations constructed of dressed stone, but by the numerous small stone buildings. The floors of the structures are littered with square nails. While surveying the Argus Range I had come across numerous stone buildings, but Reilly amazed me.

Thus began a long search for the history of the place. Two of the local historians in Trona were aware of the site and had sought and failed to uncover the same answers I was seeking. One man who had a mining claim here in the late 1960s had corresponded with Elizabeth Meacham, who at the turn of the century had lived in a nearby mine camp named Millspaugh. She had some insight into the place.

The USGS topographic map of 1954 named the place Anthony Mill Ruins. Charles Anthony figured in mining activities across the valley above Ballarat in the 1890s. It is conceivable that he could have been involved here, but it was obvious that some company had invested a lot of money. Charles Anthony was never known to be connected with anything of this scale.

One local resident told me a story that later proved totally false, that the mine was operated by Mormons, and one Sunday while they were having services, three hundred were killed by Indians. Their bodies were said to be buried at the site.

After a year and a half of searching I had little more than this. The real break came when I found a 1902 California Mining Bureau map which named the site Reilly. I contacted the California Division of Mines and Geology, who gave me the only reference in their literature, an 1890 description of the mine and mill by Henry DeGroot. From this description it was easy to find out more about the camp in the Mining and Scientific Press. The final clue was my discovery that the mining claims had been surveyed and were part of the permanent record of the Bureau of Land Management. I had missed these maps earlier because this early survey does not properly register on the topographic maps and the cadastral survey done in the 1850s.

Mining began in the Argus Range in the 1860s as an overflow from the nearby Coso and Slate Ranges. Little is known about activities here until the silver discoveries in 1875 at Darwin and Lookout. In this year rich silver ore running over 250 ounces per ton was discovered here by the Wibbett brothers. They prospected the claims, and eventually John Ely became interested in the property and set out to find someone to buy it. In the spring of 1882, he described it to Edward Reilly of New York, who inspected the claims and purchased them. In October 1882 Reilly made another visit, and was so impressed that he purchased a 10-stamp stamp mill after organizing the Argus Range Silver Mining Company with \$500,000 in stock. Sixty men worked grading for the mill, and erecting buildings including a store which measured 54 by 36 feet. According to Elizabeth Meacham, Charles Anthony essentially built the camp himself and ran everything: the hotel, barns, corrals, and blacksmith shop.

The mine consisted of four lode claims and two mill sites scattered over about two miles. These claims were surveyed in October 1882 with the obvious intent of patenting them. Most of the work was on the Bonanza King, which straddled a small drainage 2 1/2 miles south of the mouth of Shepherd Canyon.

The mill was erected (perhaps with the help of Chinese laborers) on the eastern end of the ridge north of this ravine. Just north and west of the mouth of the ravine, Edward Reilly erected his house, with a corral just to the north. Across the ravine to the south was a boarding house. The workers lived in numerous crude stone structures on the flat east of the mill and lining the slopes of the ravine. However, there was

another camp on the Star millsite. Water was piped to this camp via a one-inch iron pipe, and work was concentrated on driving an adit on the Star lode claim. The mill Reilly had purchased was slow in arriving, and was held up in Mohave for some time. To reduce expenses, all but sixteen men were laid off in late January 1883. But carpenters were still at work building the mill structure, 1,000 tons of ore were on the dumps waiting for reduction, and a post office opened on January 22. To supply water to the mill, a five-mile-long iron pipeline, reportedly costing \$40,000, was laid from Water Canyon. When the mill finally arrived it was fired up in September 1883, and immediately broke down when one of the water pumps supplying the boilers stopped working. (The problem was soon fixed.) Reilly had big hopes, for he equipped the mill with power sufficient to handle thirty stamps. But the mine did not justify his investment; according to DeGroot it was in operation only a year and a half. The Mining and Scientific Press recorded only \$21,500 worth of bullion produced between October 1883 and February 1884. Curiously, the post office closed in October 1883, the same time the mill was making its initial runs. Although the ore was free-milling and very rich, there just was not enough of it to make money, not to mention pay back the \$200,000 investment. During the late 1880s, ore from George Hearst's New York mine in the Slate Range was milled here, but the Reilly claims were never patented.

According to Dr. O. N. Cole of Trona, when Ed Teagle settled in the area around 1900 the place was in ruins. However, Meacham recalls riding to the camp just a few years later and visiting the "Reilly brothers," whoever they were. The arrastra present at the site was clearly constructed after 1900 and may have been used by these men. The pipeline remained until this century and was probably removed during one of the world wars.

The obscurity and natural stone construction of Reilly have helped to preserve it from much of the vandalism other desert camps have seen. The site of Reilly presents opportunities for the historical archaeologist. As of six years ago the site was very well preserved. However, the easy access also poses a serious threat to what remains. Positive steps to preserve this site should be undertaken.