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## SPECIAL FEATURE

### Mark Twain's "Irish Brigade" from *Roughing It* by Robert Stewart

#### Introduction by Barbara Schmidt

Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) first arrived in Nevada territory in August 1861. His brother Orion Clemens had been appointed by President Abraham Lincoln as secretary of Nevada Territory, second in command to territorial governor James W. Nye. The Clemens brothers traveled west together to Nevada territory where Orion settled into the routine duties of a government administrator. Sam Clemens quickly got caught up in various mining and get-rich-quick schemes, many of which he wrote about in his partly fictionalized book *Roughing It*. Describing his early Nevada living arrangements and encounter with the "Irish Brigade" he wrote:

The Secretary and I took quarters in the "ranch" of a worthy French lady by the name of Bridget O'Flannigan, a camp follower of his Excellency the Governor. She had known him in his prosperity as commander-in-chief of the Metropolitan Police of New York, and she would not desert him in his adversity as Governor of Nevada.

Our room was on the lower floor, facing the plaza, and when we had got our bed, a small table, two chairs, the government fire-proof safe, and the Unabridged Dictionary into it, there was still room enough left for a visitor--may be two, but not without straining the walls. But the walls could stand it--at least the partitions could, for they consisted simply of one thickness of white "cotton domestic" stretched from corner to corner of the room. This was the rule in Carson--any other kind of partition was the rare exception. And if you stood in a dark room and your neighbors in the next had lights, the shadows on your canvas told queer secrets sometimes! Very often these partitions were made of old flour sacks basted together; and then the difference between the common herd and the aristocracy was, that the common herd had unornamented sacks, while the walls of the aristocrat were overpowering with rudimental fresco--i.e., red and blue mill brands on the flour sacks.

Occasionally, also, the better classes embellished their canvas by pasting pictures from *Harper's Weekly* on them. In many cases, too, the wealthy and the cultured rose to spittoons and other evidences of a sumptuous and luxurious taste. [Washoe people take a joke so hard that I must explain that the above description was only the rule; there were many honorable exceptions in Carson--plastered ceilings and houses that had considerable furniture in them.--M. T.]

We had a carpet and a genuine queen's-ware washbowl. Consequently we were hated without reserve by the other tenants of the O'Flannigan "ranch." When we added a painted oilcloth window curtain, we simply took our lives into our own hands. To prevent bloodshed I removed up stairs and took up quarters with the untitled plebeians in one of the fourteen white pine cot-bedsteads that stood in two long ranks in the one sole room of which the second story consisted.



**THE IRISH BRIGADE**  
*Illustration by True Williams*  
*from first edition of ROUGHING IT*

It was a jolly company, the fourteen. They were principally voluntary camp-followers of the Governor, who had joined his retinue by their own election at New York and San Francisco and came along, feeling that in the scuffle for little territorial crumbs and offices they could not make their condition more precarious than it was, and might reasonably expect to make it better. They were popularly known as the "Irish Brigade," though there were only four or five Irishmen among all the Governor's retainers.

His good-natured Excellency was much annoyed at the gossip his henchmen created--especially when there arose a rumor that they were paid assassins of his, brought along to quietly reduce the democratic vote when desirable!

- *Roughing It*, Chapter 21

In Chapter 22 of *Roughing It*, Twain writes of his first trip to visit Lake Tahoe, also known as Lake Bigler. "Three or four members of the Brigade had been there and located some timber lands on its shores and stored up a quantity of provisions in their camp." Traveling with a companion, Twain intended to find the old camp of the Irish Brigade members. "We found the small skiff belonging to the Brigade boys, and without loss of time set out across a deep bend of the lake toward the landmarks that signified the locality of the camp. (*Roughing It*, Chapter 22).

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Researching the old mining claims and records books in the archives of the state of Nevada, researcher Robert Stewart has been able to identify some members of Twain's "Irish Brigade." A formal land survey of the Brigade's timber claim had to wait until completion of a federal survey of the township in which it was located. That occurred the following year in 1862. In the 1860s, timber claims--like mining claims--were made by

marking off land with piles of rock, tree trunks laid down as corners, or other markings. In January 1862, county officers were elected in the new Territory of Nevada. In due course, later that same year, Ormsby County Surveyor James S. Lawson provided the Brigade with a survey of the claim. Only then could it be formally recorded with County Recorder S.D. King.

The following names in boldface have been identified as members of Twain's "Irish Brigade." They are listed in the survey of the timber claim from the Ormsby County Surveyor's Survey #40 "of the claim of Nye and others situated in the East shore of Lake Bigler in the County of Ormsby and Territory of Nevada, the boundaries whereof are described as follows...." James S. Lawson, County Surveyor, 19 September 1862.

The claim is filed in *Volume 3, County Records*, pp. 197-200, Carson City Clerk's Office, Carson City, Nevada. (County Surveyor James S. Lawson was thirty-one years old in the 1862 Nevada census. In September 1861, he surveyed the East & South Township lines of Township 15 North, 18 East, mdm, under a contract issued September 14, 1861. This Township was not subdivided until 1865, when it was surveyed in detail by Butler Ives.

**John Nye** - brother of Territorial Governor James Nye, he was forty-eight in the Nevada census of 1862. Captain John Nye died in Washington, D. C., July 7, 1871. He came to California in 1849, and was a resident of Placer County for many years. Prior to coming to California he had been mayor of the city of Mobile, Alabama, and had held several other high offices. "Deceased was a man of warm impulses and fine conversational powers." See: <http://www.genealogymagazine.com/piobofplcoca.html>. John Nye came west from Alabama in 1848, leaving his wife and family in Alabama, according to his sister Kate Nye Starr (Starr, *A Self-sufficient Woman*, p. 94, UNR microfilm). A "Capt. Nye" was a passenger on the steamer *Crescent City* when it left New York in July 1849 (Haskins, *Argonauts*, and Spinazze, *Index to the Argonauts*).

**Thomas Nye**, - son of John Nye, he was a clerk, boarding with Mrs. Margret (sic) Murphy in the 1863 *Carson City Directory*; he was 19 in the Nevada 1862 special census. He was later the private secretary to Governor James Nye. On October 25, 1861 Clemens indicates he and Thomas have been at Lake Tahoe for a brief visit, telling his sister Pamela A. Moffett that "I have already laid a timber claim on the borders of a Lake which throws Como in the shade -- and if we succeed in getting one Mr. Jones to move his saw-mill up there, Mr. Moffett can just consider that claim better than bank stock. ...In that claim I took up about two miles in length by one in width--and the names in it are as follows: "Sam. L. Clemens, Wm A. Moffett, Thos. Nye" and three others. It is situated on "Sam Clemens' Bay"-- so named by Capt. Nye...." (*Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 1, 1853-1866*, p. 129-30).

**P. G. Childs** - was among the first to sign the Committee of Vigilance roster in San Francisco following Casey's shooting of James King of William in San Francisco in 1856.

**John C. Burch** - assistant Indian Agent to Territorial Governor Nye in Kelly's 1862 *First Directory*. As a member of the Captain John Nye tree claim, he helped survey the claim, and named a stream on it for himself. (The name didn't stick -- today it is Marlette Creek.) He may have come to the Territory in 1860 as disbursing agent (paymaster) for Col. F.W. Lander's team building an overland road to Oregon, and remained in the territory when Lander was assigned to a Civil War post. (The newsmaking presence of Rep. John C. Burch, D - California in the early 1860s makes the Nye/Nevada John Burch hard to trace. They are two different individuals who have the same name.)

**J. E. Coulter** - In 1875 Coulter was a visiting Mason at a special assembly of the Virginia City Lodge #3 when it gathered atop Mount Davidson above Virginia City. He was a member of the Nevada Assembly during the 1877 session.

**John Ives** - a physician located on the north side of the Plaza in the *Carson City Directory*. Margaret Murphy's boarding house is in the same block. Ives was fifty years old when the census of 1862 was being taken. (His name, appears twice in that document with ages 49 and 50.) According to Bob Ellison, historian in Minden, Nevada John Ives was the doctor for the New York Police Department when James Nye was the Commissioner, and then came West with Nye. He moved from Carson City to Aurora, and was elected State Senator from Esmeralda County November 8, 1864, and served in the 1864-65, and 1866 sessions. Then he was in New York from June 1865 until December, raising financing, during which time he corresponded steadily with Samuel Youngs of Aurora.

**J. H. Kinkead** - listed in the *Carson City Directory* as Kinkead, Harrington & Co., SE corner of Plaza and Carson streets, resides NE corner of Musser and Nevada. Kinkead Harrington & Co. sold groceries, dry goods, clothing, mining tools, provisions, etc. A man with many mining interests, he was appointed Territorial Treasurer by Governor Nye. He was also a member of both Nevada Constitutional Conventions, and was elected as the third Governor of Nevada (1879-1882).

**Ira M. Luther** - Luther, 41 in 1861, was left on his own at an early age. He arrived in California in 1850, and profited from a trip to Oregon to purchase goods to sell in the goldfields of California. In 1858 he settled in Carson Valley. A man with many interests, he was active numerous aspects of the early years of settlement in western Nevada. Luther Pass between Woodfords and Lake Tahoe is named for him.

**James Neary** - Neary was forty-four in the 1862 Nevada Territorial Census. In the *Carson City Directory* he is a speculator, boarding with Mrs. Murphy on the north side of the Plaza. According to Bob Ellison, historian in Minden, Nevada Neary came West with James W. Nye. Clemens mentions "Neary's tunnel" in a letter to his brother dated 11 and 12 May 1862 (*Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 1, 1853-1866*, p. 207). No further Nevada records have been located for him. In the 1880 federal census, a James Neary and his wife Catherine, both born in Ireland, he in 1820 and she in 1830, were living in New York City.

**T. B. Smithson** - No Nevada records have been located for Smithson. A man named T. B. Smithson, born in Ireland about 1831, was a liquor dealer living in Ward 9 in San Francisco in the 1870 federal census. He would have been about thirty years old in 1861.

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Robert Stewart is author of *Aurora, Nevada's Ghost City of the Dawn*, and conducts continuing research into the people of Nevada's territorial years.

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