

# HISTORY OF PIOCHE

*Written by Candice Mortenson, owner of The Overland Hotel*

Pioche began with a silver discovery in the winter of 1863 when Paiute Indians showed a Mormon missionary silver ore, and disclosed its source in exchange for food and clothing. Serious development did not begin until 1868 when San Francisco financier F.L. Pioche bought several claims and erected a smelter. Production in 1870 amounted to more than \$1,600,000, from high grade silver ore hauled to Bullionville by wagon (10 miles from Pioche). From 1870 through 1877, more than \$20 million of ore was mined. This is an unimaginable amount of money at the value of today's dollar. It was with this addition of silver from Pioche that Nevada became the largest silver producer in the world. In 1871, Pioche was named as the county seat of Lincoln County. Treasure Hill was the main area of ore production. You can see Treasure Hill at the top of Main Street where the mines and tailings still sit. In 1873 construction was begun on the narrow gauge Pioche & Bullionville Railroad, (known as the "Dinky" train), which eliminated the necessity of hauling the ore by wagon. In the 1870s Pioche became an attractive camp with several substantial businesses, a water system, school, bank and the publication of the Pioche Daily Record. The Record is still produced weekly, and is now the Lincoln County Record.

The fame of Pioche's rich mines was matched by the disrepute of its crime. Most offenses generally went unpunished. The frequency of murder alone made Pioche notorious for frequent gunplay. The excessive amount of claim-jumping, fraud and killings made guns the only law, and "reliable legend" insists that violent deaths accounted for 72 graves in Boot Hill before a citizen of Pioche died of natural causes. The most famous outlaw buried in Boot Hill is Morgan Courtney. Contrary to popular lore there never was a hanging in Pioche. Pioche was deadlier than the more famous old western towns such as Deadwood S.D., Tombstone AZ, and Dodge City, KS. In the 1870s there were about 10,000 people living in Pioche----with 144 saloons (many of which had brothels on the second floor) and 4 stand-alone bordellos.

There were devastating flash floods in 1873 and 1874 as well as a ravaging fire in 1871 which gutted the commercial district and caused eleven deaths. The area began to decline and litigation tied up many important mines. In 1876 the two largest mining companies ceased major operations and through 1889 activity was minimal. The mines again began producing ore regularly starting in 1912 when the Salt Lake Railroad through Lincoln County was extended to Pioche. The aerial tramway which hauled ore from Treasure Hill to the still standing mill was built in 1920 and operated until the early 1930s. The tramway is still intact and has many ore cars hanging from it although the mill hasn't operated in over 60 years.

The depression in the early 1930s closed the mines, but beginning in 1937 Pioche was an outstanding lead-zinc producer for twenty years. Most mining ceased about 1958 but exploratory work resumed in the mid-1960s. The mines have been closed since the 1970s, and now the main interest is as a tourist and recreation destination. Welcome to Pioche and The Overland Hotel!