

Camp McGarry, Nevada — A Bibliographical Essay (with graphics)

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Camp McGarry was established at Summit Lake in northwestern Humboldt County, Nevada, on November 23, 1865, to protect mail and emigrant routes leading to northern California and southern Idaho and Oregon and was abandoned on December 18, 1868.

Lore has given rise to a vernacular culture that places the camp in Soldier Meadow, about eight miles southwest of Summit Lake. This essay examines the veracity of primary and secondary references on the subject.

Among the most compelling primary references relative to the Summit Lake location are Gaskell's 1867 map of Nevada and E.S. Davis' township map (1873), both of which place the camp in its correct proximity to the lake (Figures 1 and 2).

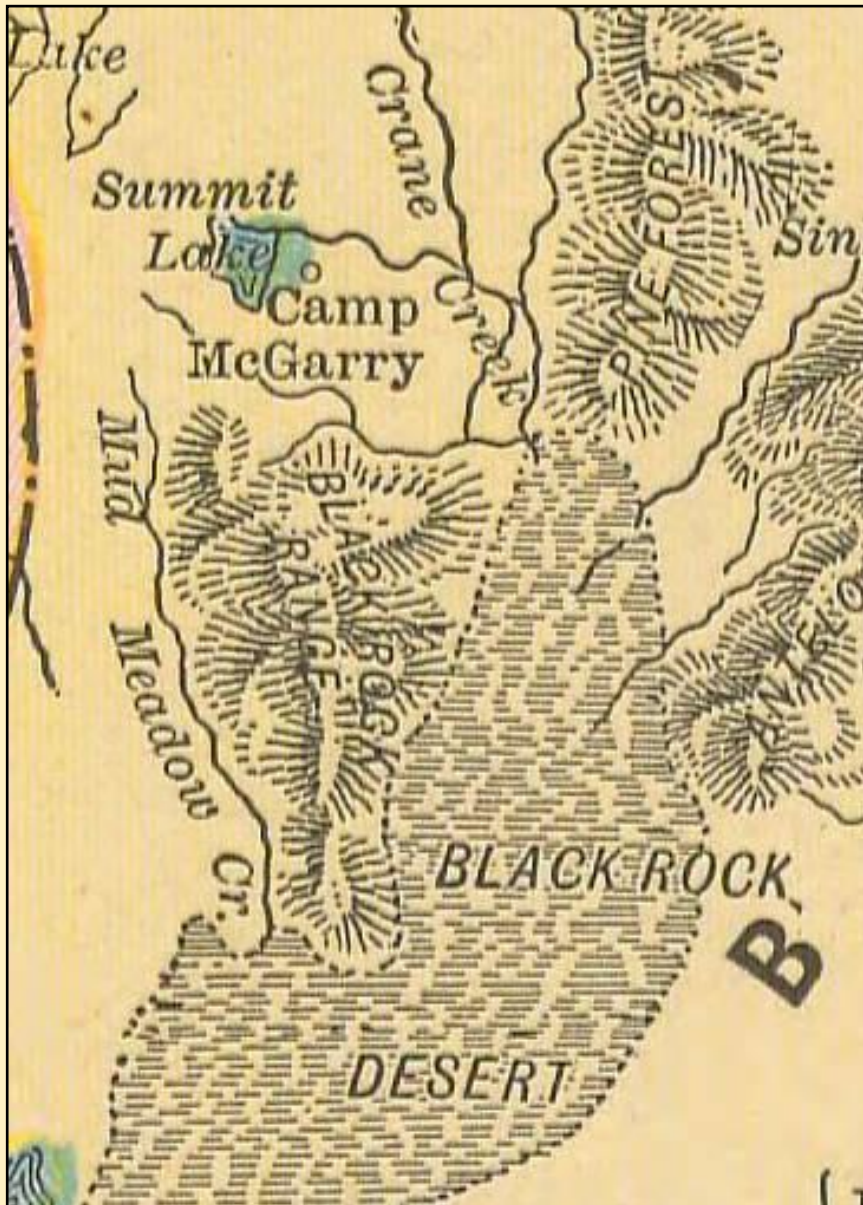


Figure 1. A clip of the Nevada map from *Gaskell's Atlas of the World*, 1867, locates Camp McGarry at Summit Lake.

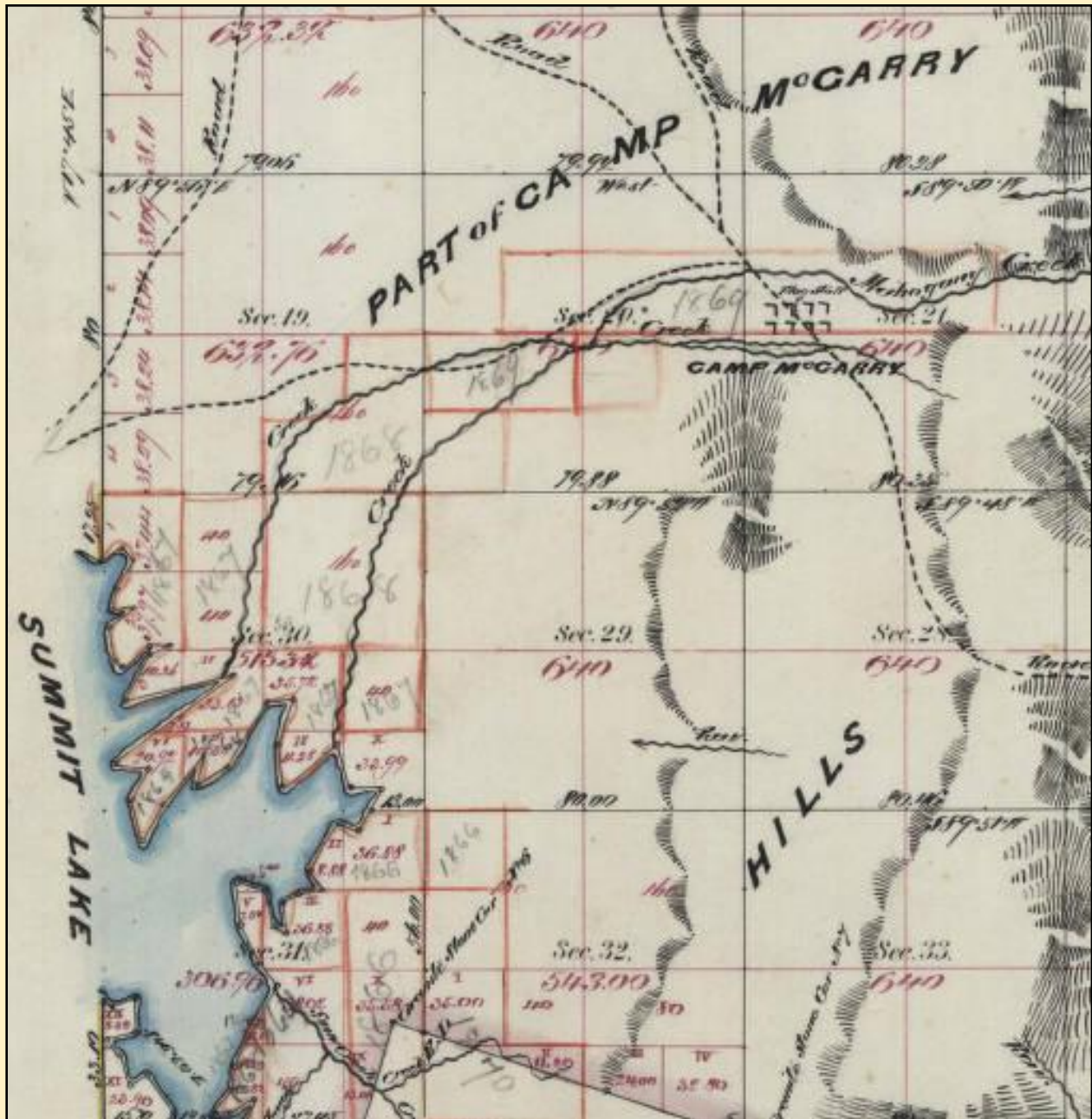


Figure 2. E.S. Davis' U.S. Land Office plat of T42 N., R26 E., 1873, shows the location of Camp McGarry, near Summit Lake.

Perhaps the association of Camp McGarry with Soldier Meadow in Section 8, Township 40 North, Range 25 East is rooted in a hereto fully undocumented account of sutlers at the location. Sessions Wheeler (1978, p. 152, 171) notes: "The military abandoned Fort McGarry (*sic*) and Soldier Meadows in late 1868, and sometime afterward the two men who had operated the sutler's post at the fort acquired the meadows with the hope of making it into a ranch... Ralph Parman believes the sutlers' names were Crocker and Clark."

Wheeler's errors in nomenclature and lack of documentation detract from the reference's credibility, however, another Davis township map of the area (1872) shows deeded land and locates "Crocker's House" in the area later referred to as Soldier Meadow (Figure 3).



Figure 3. "Crocker's House" and deeded land (red outlines) appear on Davis' 1872 map of the Soldier Meadow area.

Of the several secondary documents on the subject, Col. George Ruhlen (1964, pp. 44-45) appears to be the most reliable, but it, too, is not without documentation issues. To his credit, Ruhlen consulted primary military documents contemporary with the camp, but then detracts from his scholarship by quoting Mack (1936, p. 324), whose work has serious documentation issues relative to Soldier Meadow: "Later a number of stone buildings were erected some distance south of Camp McGarry for the men, officers, and soldiers at Soldier Meadows. A short distance south of the fort a stone barn large enough to hold 100 horses, officers' quarters, and a mess hall and barracks were constructed. Through underground passages the men could go to the barn or from the mess hall to the barracks without exposing themselves. In the latter buildings, whose walls were two feet thick, connections were made between the fireplaces."

Mack credits Hamersly (1880, p. 144) for the above information, but the source only provides dates of establishment and abandonment of Camp McGarry at Summit Springs, near the lake.

Murbarger (1956, pp. 6-7) repeats some of the lore and misnames the outpost: "Soldier Meadows is a fine old ranch that anyone would be proud to own. In a grove of towering Lombardy poplars, planted 85 years ago, sets a great collection of stone barns and outbuildings, and pole corrals. These buildings, erected in the 1860s as an outpost of Fort McGarry, seven miles to the north, later became one of the home ranches of the far-flung Miller & Lux empire."

She continues, "One of the old Fort McGarry buildings is incorporated in the attractive new home built recently by Wesley and Theodosia Fick, who purchased the Soldier Meadows property ten years ago and moved here from Holtville, in California's Imperial Valley...."

Jones (1980, p. 63) borrows from Ruhlen (1964) and Mack (1936) and surmises about the origins of certain Soldier Meadow-area structures: "Just north of Mud Meadows at Soldier Meadows is a site of historic interest. Located here are the remains of an outpost of Camp McGary (*sic*). Camp McGary (*sic*) was built at Summit Springs near Summit Lake in 1865 for the purpose of protecting the Idaho mail route to Chico, California. Shortly after the camp was established, a 100-horse capacity barn, a mess hall, officers quarters, and barracks, with underground tunnels leading from the barn and mess hall to the barracks, were constructed at Soldier Meadows. The barn and several of the buildings ... still stand and have been incorporated into present-day Soldier Meadows Ranch...."

Photographs provide an unbiased level of documentation as one asks, "What type of structure would soldiers in the wilderness build while under threat from perceived hostile forces, time constraints and limited resources?"

A Summit Lake structure in a Murbarger photograph (Figure 4) in Paher (2009, p. 47) is identified as a remnant of Camp McGarry and exhibits native dry stone architecture with thatched roof, a plausible style for the circumstances of construction and in sharp contrast to the studied aesthetics of two structures in Soldier Meadow purportedly to have been built by the military of the Camp McGarry era, according to some writers.

Another troubling source of inaccurate information about Camp McGarry is the text of state-sponsored Nevada historical marker 162, situated on a county road in Soldier Meadow. Location error, inconsistency of nomenclature and a misleading inference about the year of establishment and size of the Paiute Reservation at Summit Lake are especially disturbing (Basso, 2008).



Figure 4. Nell Murbarger photographed this Camp McGarry ruin near Summit Lake in 1954. *Courtesy of Stanley Paher.*

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