

MAY - JUNE 1913

BOTTLES AND EXTRAS

ELKO

# TWINABA

A NEVADA PATENT MEDICINE

by Eric McGuire

NEVADA



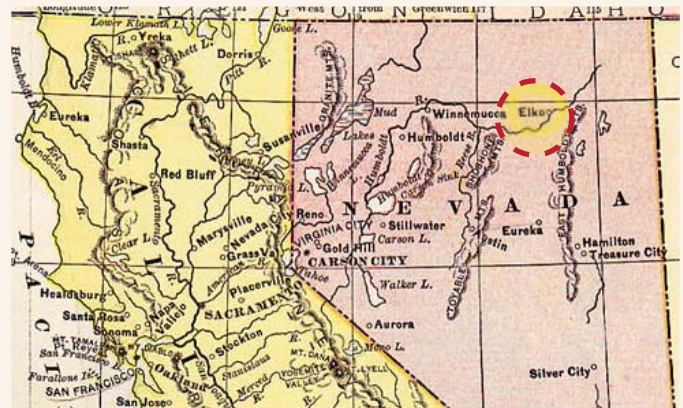
**Nevada was not known as a place for patent medicine development. Most of the population was focused on mining and ranching.**



An undated 19th century view of Elko, Nevada, nestled in the sagebrush plain of the Humboldt River.

One of the most significant events in the development of the western United States was the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869. It instantly changed development patterns and transportation modes throughout the West. The railroad also had the initial effect of funneling nearly all the movement of people and goods along the rail corridor, which passed through the railroad town of Elko, Nevada.

Elko was designated the county seat of Elko County, Nevada, which was created on March 5, 1869, from land previously located in Lander County. Elko County has a surface area of 17,023 square miles - the fourth largest in the United States. The town of Elko was initially established in 1868 as a temporary housing and equipment center for construction of the eastern end of the Central Pacific portion of the Transcontinental Railroad. After the railroad completed its project the town continued to be a populated place, serving as a hub for the ranching and mining community for northeastern Nevada as well as serving as the government center for the county. By 1870 it had a population approaching 1,200. The population must have been comprised of a special type of person, obviously of pioneering blood, willing to embrace isolated surroundings and harsh conditions.



Elko is located in the northwest corner of Nevada, about 150 miles west of the Utah border

Nevada was not known as a place for patent medicine development. Most of the population was focused on mining and ranching. Its first two medicine patents came out of Virginia City, which may be expected since it was the largest city during the state's earliest years. Elko was an unlikely place for medicine to be patented, but it can claim the third known medicine patent for Nevada, which is also represented by the earliest known embossed Nevada patent medicine bottle.

Three individuals helped in the development of TWIABA - OR NEVADA NATURAL HAIR RESTORATIVE OF WHITE SAGE. The first activity noted was the filing of a patent for the ingredients of the product. The patentees were William P. Thomas, an Elko lawman, and Joseph F. Boardman, about whom



nothing can be found. He is probably the same Joseph F. Boardman who was counted among the voters of Darwin, Inyo County, California, in its 1875 Great Register of Voters. He is listed as a miner, age 33 years and born in Massachusetts. The patent application is signed by two witnesses, Tom Cox, the obligatory attorney who undoubtedly prepared the application and Samuel Gaston, another Elko lawman. Their patent application is dated January 6, 1871 and with great speed, by March 14, 1871, a patent was granted. The details of the patent were exceptionally easy to comprehend, and in fact, so easy that it is amazing the U.S. Patent Office even granted such exclusivity for the product. Boil down six pounds of freshly cut and three pounds dry white sage in a gallon of water until half the water is gone. Add one-half ounce oil of bergamot (essence of orange) and a pint of alcohol. According to the patent, when applied, this substance will restore hair to bald heads and return the hair to its original color.

The indigenous Shoshoni tribe commonly used white sage (*Salvia apiana*) as a tea, and incense, but there are no references to its native use as a hair restorative. Twiaba was, by constituency, an alcohol-laced Earl Grey Tea. This writer submits that Twiaba would have become much more popular if the directions for use recommended internal use instead of external application. The name "Twiaba" has yet to be identified as a Shoshoni word, but it seems likely to have been borrowed from their vocabulary.

Perhaps the most illustrious individual involved with developing Twiaba was the sheriff of Elko County, Nevada, - Joshua Benjamin Fitch. Born in 1831 in Baltimore, Maryland, Ben Fitch came West with the initial rush to the California gold country. He was a storied person befitting a stereotypical man of the West who could seemingly do anything he set his mind to. With his primary occupation as sheriff, Fitch apparently gained control of Twiaba from the beginning, probably by providing the funds necessary to market the product. Joseph Boardman became the actual compounder of the ingredients and William Thomas was silent in the operation, perhaps bought out and happy to liquidate his interest - a wise choice. Thomas had been a lawman who worked for Ben Fitch. In fact, three of the

# United States Patent Office.

WILLIAM P. THOMAS AND JOSEPH F. BOARDMAN, OF ELKO, NEVADA.

Letters Patent No. 112,749, dated March 14, 1871.

## IMPROVEMENT IN HAIR-RESTORATIVES.

The Schedule referred to in these Letters Patent and making part of the same.

WE, WILLIAM P. THOMAS and JOSEPH F. BOARDMAN, both residents of Elko, county of Elko, State of Nevada, have invented a certain Compound called "Nevada Natural Hair-Restorative of White Sage," to be used to restore the hair to bald scalps of the human head

The nature of the said invention consists in boiling white sage, in the proportion of six pounds green and three pounds dry, in a gallon of soft water, and mixing therewith, after it has boiled down to two quarts, one-half ounce of oil bergamot and a pint of alcohol.

This composition will restore the hair to its native

color, is not a hair-dye, and is a great cleanser of the scalp; and

We hereby claim—

The said compound, prepared substantially as described.

Elko, January 6, A. D. 1871.

WILLIAM P. THOMAS.  
JOSEPH F. BOARDMAN.

Witnesses:

TOM COX,  
SAMUEL GASTON.

### Patent for Improvements in Hair-Restoratives.

individuals involved with this product were lawmen - Fitch, Thomas and Gaston.

Fitch set about ordering bottles from one of the two glass works located in San Francisco, California, along with the necessary labels, boxes and other advertising. On May 6, 1871, the first advertisement was printed in the San Francisco newspapers.

At this early stage, it appears that Fitch and Boardman were doing all the work in management, preparation and

**TWIBA - TO THE BALD HEADED -**  
**NEVADA NATURAL HAIR RESTORATIVE**  
**OF WHITE SAGE.** Don't fail to use the above preparation and be Bald no more. J. B. FITCH & CO., Proprietors, Elko, Nevada. The Restorative is scientifically compounded, principally from purely Vegetable matter, gathered from the mountains and plains of Nevada, and contains no ingredient that is not in itself of a Restoring, Cleansing and Purifying character. We do not claim and do not believe that White Sage, simply steeped or boiled to a tea, will restore the hair; but we do claim and also know that our PREPARATION of White Sage is a sure cure for baldness. To restore the hair to the human head in cases of baldness it has no equal. As a speedy cure for Dandruff or any disease of the head or scalp, our Preparation of White Sage is unsurpassed. Is a sure preventive of the hair becoming gray, and by constant application will restore gray hair to its original color, beauty and strength. As a dressing for the hair and an article for the Toilet Table, it is unrivaled. Beware of counterfeits, as none is genuine unless bearing the date of our Letters Patent, issued March 14th, 1871, and prepared by JOSEPH F. BOARDMAN & CO., Elko, Nevada. Price, \$1 50 per bottle; \$15 per doz; \$8 per half doz. Address all communications to JOSEPH F. BOARDMAN, Superintendent White Sage Manufactory, Elko, Nevada. my4

The first advertisement for Twiaba in the Daily Alta California (San Francisco, Calif.), May 6, 1871.



**"TWIABA,"**  
OR  
**NEVADA WHITE SAGE**  
**Hair Restorative.**

**THE ONLY SURE RESTORER OF THE**  
**HAIR AND PROMOTER OF ITS GROWTH.**



For sale by the Agent,  
**CHAS. E. HINCKLEY,**  
Chemist and Apothecary,  
32 POST STREET.

See the name "TWIABA" on each bottle and  
take no other. no26-2p

Daily Alta California (San Francisco, Calif.),  
November 16, 1871.

j41 SACRAMENTO. f1mlp

**TERRY McMORRY,**  
**APOTHECARY,**

 **210 J street, bet. 7th and 8th.** 

**PURE DRUGS AND CHEMICALS.**  
Choice Perfumery and Toilet Articles.  
Pure Wines and Liquors for medicinal purposes.  
Agent for "TWIABA," White Sage Hair Restorative. j2-1mlp

Sacramento Daily Union, May 3, 1873

advertisement of Twiaba. By November of 1871, Fitch arranged for the large San Francisco wholesale druggist, Charles E. Hinckley, to act as agent and market and sell the product. This would certainly relieve a prominent lawman of his less hazardous activities in order to focus on controlling threats to society, of which there were plenty in Elko.

Apparently, Hinckley was not happy with the effectiveness of Twiaba, since his advertisements only lasted a couple of weeks. Ben Fitch must have predicted that Twiaba was not going to be the success that he had hoped for. He sold out to Samuel Gaston in November 1871, one of the witnesses to the federal patent application for Twiaba, and who worked for Fitch as a lawman.<sup>(1)</sup> As the new owner of Twiaba, it is likely that Gaston procured the new agency with Sacramento druggist, Terry McMorry, whose first Twiaba advertisement appeared in January 1872. McMorry continued pushing Twiaba for a year and a half until the last advertisement appeared May 3, 1873.

It is also likely that Gaston made no profit on the Twiaba venture. At least by 1875, he was in the livery business in Elko County.<sup>(2)</sup> Gaston eventually moved to Shasta County, California, and became a miner in his later years. He died there on November 6, 1909.

Nothing more could be found that documents the existence of Twiaba after the termination of McMorry's advertisements. It is likely that the product had been in the hands - and on the heads - of the public for a sufficient time to test its effectiveness, and the trial failed. After all, with claims that surpass Rogaine, if it had worked as promised Twiaba would still be on the market today, and Ben Fitch and associates would have been some of the richest men in the West - and perhaps the world, all due to the frail human insecurities caused by hair loss.

Without doubt, Ben Fitch played a major role in bringing this short-lived product to market. Even though his involvement was even shorter than the life of the product, this important figure behind Twiaba deserves a little more documentation. Fitch was not just a gun-toting lawman who tried his hand at patent medicine. A brief quote in the San Francisco Call on November 30, 1896, gives some insight into his character:

*"Fitch is part of the history of this State and Nevada. He was the foreman in the building of the Montgomery block, one of the few remaining landmarks of pioneer days. He built the courthouse, jail and State University at Elko, Nev., where he was Sheriff in 1868-72 and in 1880-84."*<sup>(3)</sup>

*"But the most interesting part of Ben Fitch's career is when, in the 70's, he was a candidate against Partick*



**Embossed TWIABA / WARRANTED on the side panels, the bottle is medium aqua in color with applied top and smooth base. It is 7" in height. It is likely that all bottles were blown in 1871 but certainly no later than 1873.**

01. Elko Independent, November 18, 1871

02. Nevada State Census, 1875

03. Actually, Fitch was elected sheriff of Elko County on June 21, 1869, re-elected November 8, 1870; resigned October 8, 1872, re-elected November 5, 1878, and re-elected again on November 2, 1880.





Some closer views of the Twibia Bottle

largest commercial building west of the Mississippi. It was claimed to be fireproof and earthquake proof and built under the direction of Ben Fitch as construction foreman.

Fitch is documented as being in Oroville, Butte County,

*Crowley, the incumbent, for the position of Chief of Police of this City and County."*

The Montgomery Block in San Francisco, noted above, was built in 1853 and was then the



California, in 1858 when the town was struck by a large fire. His liquor store, located on the east side of Huntoon Street, suffered considerable damage on July 6th.<sup>(4)</sup> Fitch remained in Oroville for a few more years but went back to San Francisco in 1862 and opened the Eureka Billiard Saloon with partner, Oscar Wetherbee, above the Eureka Theatre at 314 Montgomery Street, in April of that year.

Fitch was a gambling man and hedged his bets whenever he could. At the same time he, along with four others,<sup>(5)</sup> formed The Best Chance Gold and Silver Mining Company, for the purpose of mining in the Echo District of Nevada Territory.<sup>(6)</sup>

**EUREKA BILLIARD SALOON,**  
**Over the Eureka Theatre.**  
**FITCH & WETHERBEE.....PROPRIETORS**  
**THIS ROOM HAS BEEN FITTED UP**  
 without regard to expense, in the most superb style, with all the latest improvements, and with a view to make it the most attractive resort for the admirers of the noble game in the city.  
 It contains seven of Jacob Strahle's Tables, of the most elegant finish and improved pattern.  
 The Bar is supplied with the best of Wines and Liquors.  
 The public are invited to call and see for themselves.  
 J. B. FITCH. [ap16] O. WETHERBEE.

Advertisement for the Eureka Billiard Saloon from the Daily Alta California, April 25, 1863.

In 1865, Oscar Wetherbee left the saloon partnership and Fitch took on Stephen F. Merritt to fill the vacancy. Never to be idle, Fitch also co-created the Bay View Park Stock Association with partner I.M. Harter. No doubt with some selfish motive, Fitch loved to race and trot horses, and such a venue would satisfy his fancy and perhaps turn a profit. This association was composed of about 100 of San Francisco's most prominent and wealthiest residents for the purpose of racing horses with substantial purses at stake.<sup>(7)</sup>

By 1867, Fitch had closed the Eureka Billiard Saloon and had no more interest in the Bay View Park Stock Association. In partnership with Joseph W. Little, he opened the Market Exchange Saloon in the rear of the Odd Fellows Hall in San Francisco. Little left the partnership and Fitch continued with his saloon. Moss never grew in the shadow of

04. Sacramento Daily Union, July 8, 1858

05. One of his fellow trustees was Jacob Strahle, who built the billiard tables used in the Eureka Billiard Saloon.

06. Daily Alta California, March 1, 1863

07. ibid, 2 October 1865

Fitch. In January of 1869, he sold the Market Exchange to James McCabe, the former barkeeper on the paddle wheeler Chrysopolis. Along with his ubiquitous penchant for greener pastures, and undoubtedly forecasting some economic opportunities coming out of the opening of the transcontinental railroad, Fitch headed for Elko, Nevada.

Fitch was well connected with a number of influential men in San Francisco. Throughout his life he continued to invest in the excitement of mining. After all, it is often akin to gambling, and in the end he did not fare well. He continued his mining investments during 1863, all in the new “boom” territory of Nevada. Along with John C. Gibson and Thomas Gardner he formed the Brighton Gold and Silver Mining Company<sup>(8)</sup>. Fitch also formed the Gibson Gold and Silver Mining Company with G.S. Chapin and J.C. Chapin as well as the Orizaba No. 2 Gold and Silver Mining Company with J.C. Gibson and Alonzo Fenn.<sup>(9)</sup>

In 1868 Ben Fitch married the widow, Mrs. Julia Stevenson. Born in Chazy, Clinton County, New York, in 1846 she moved to Oroville, California, with her parents in 1852. Julia first married A. Stevenson, the County Recorder of Butte County, in 1862. One son, Fred Stevenson, was born to her but she was widowed in 1865. She then married Ben Fitch.

Fitch immediately began his career as sheriff of Elko County, when elected in 1869, which came with a number of “wild west” gun-slinging events too numerous to completely recount here. One example occurred back in San Francisco. Ben Fitch had a far reaching reputation as an expert in the world of billiards and many high stakes and high profile tournaments were held in that city. Sheriff Fitch was called from Elko to judge a match in 1870 between Deery and Dion. Deery won and the crowd was invited to Deery & Little’s Billiard Saloon to meet the champion, . . . “filling the place to its utmost capacity.” Revelry continued late into the night and a call was made for the crowd to leave before the doors were closed. One in attendance was Bernard Connolly, who did not want to leave and had to be ejected by force. He then drew his pistol and aimed at one of the bouncers. Fitch was near at hand and deflected the pistol which caused Connolly to shoot himself in the leg. Fitch received only a slightly burned hand.<sup>(10)</sup>

In June of 1870, Fitch was in the middle of another skirmish in Elko, as reported by the Alta:

*“Yesterday morning about 3 o’clock, a man named*

*Barney Cosgrove stabbed a woman, Annie Nelson, with whom he had been living, in sixty or seventy places. Her screams brought Constable Banks to the scene, and a scuffle between Banks and Cosgrove ensued, in which Banks received a severe stab in the side. Sheriff Ben Fitch and Deputy Sheriff John Meadowcraft, hearing the noise, came to the rescue, and arrested Cosgrove. Fitch fired three shots at him, one taking effect in the left breast, going clean through him. Nelson will probably not recover. Cosgrove’s wound is not considered dangerous. . . Lynch law was freely talked of yesterday.”<sup>(11)</sup>*

Just one more story, as noted in the Sacramento

**From Elko, Nev.—A Desperate Struggle.**  
**ELKO, September 5th.**  
 A dispatch received from Kelton by Sheriff Fitch states that his posse, who went in pursuit of three men who robbed the stage near Humboldt Wells a few nights since, overtook the robbers near Goose Creek and had a desperate fight with them, the deputy and two assistants having their horses shot dead under them. The posse were armed with Henry rifles, but could get nothing. After losing their horses they were obliged to make their way to Kelton on foot.

**Daily Union: From the Sacramento Daily Union, September 6, 1872**

Perhaps it was a desired hiatus from all the shooting and chasing bad people that caused Fitch to resign his position as sheriff on October 8, 1872, but more likely was his vision that a lot of money could be made in the building industry. The Nevada State Legislature had designated Elko as the location of the University of Nevada, which would be a lucrative construction contract. The hot and dry condition of Elko made wooden buildings particularly vulnerable to fire. In fact, Ben Fitch lost a building to fire on October 16, 1869.<sup>(12)</sup> He was the first to establish a brick-making plant in the town to provide for the option of using fireproof building material, so he was in a strategic position to win building contracts for public structures. This fact led him to construct the courthouse and jail in Elko and finally the University of Nevada in 1873.<sup>(13)</sup>

Profits were undoubtedly realized from his construction activities and again, Fitch invested in the mining business. This time he was involved with the incorporation of the Cornucopia Consolidated Gold and Silver mining Company to acquire mining lands and mines in Elko County. The

08. *ibid*, October 23, 1863

09. *ibid*

10. *ibid*, February 5, 1870) (Note also that the Sacramento Daily Union of February 5, 1870, reported that Fitch received a gunshot wound from the ball passing through his hand in this fracas. The Alta version is

likely the most correct.)

11. *ibid*, June 7, 1870

12. *ibid*, October 17, 1869

13. Sacramento Daily Union, October 25, 1873



other directors were J.W. Pence, L.I. Mowry, Edward Chatlin and Mrs. M. Pierson.<sup>(14)</sup> The Cornucopia mines were highly profitable for a short time, but the town was abandoned by the early 1880s.

Even though his residence was Elko, Ben Fitch opened another saloon in San Francisco in 1876. Advertised as a "Gentleman's Retreat," it was operated by John T. Veal who was recently from Chico, Calif., where he was a bartender. The saloon soon became notorious as a gambling house which was a strictly illegal activity in California. The first raid by police occurred on November 18, 1876. The establishment was surrounded and upon entering, no one was there except the watchman at the bottom of the stairs, who was arrested. A complete layout of Faro equipment was confiscated, but the raid was an embarrassment to the police.

The San Francisco Call commented that, "It simply proves that gamblers can be taken only by the application of chloride of sodium to what, in cattle, is that posterior prolongation and tapering termination employed by the quadruped to dislodge insects."<sup>(15)</sup> The next raid was more successful. Shortly after midnight, a police posse again surrounded Fitch's saloon, breaking down the door and rushing upstairs where a full house of gamblers ran for the doors and windows, but a total of 42 were taken prisoner. Twenty-three were each released on \$40 bail and the remainder . . . "enjoyed the cool, pure air of the City Cattle-pens."<sup>(16)</sup> Fitch's Saloon was only history after that date. Veal went back to Chico and eventually operated a stage line.

Fitch was elected sheriff of Elko County again from 1878 until 1884. The mid to late 1880s witnessed Ben Fitch open the Bulls Head Hotel in Wells, about 50 miles east of Elko, which he advertised as . . . "the grandest and finest in the State of Nevada"<sup>(17)</sup> He maintained the hotel until February 8, 1893, when a fire started in the building which eventually consumed the entire business district of the small town.<sup>(18)</sup>

Apparently financially compromised Ben Fitch, once again, tried his hand in the patent medicine business. With several influential business partners who incorporated as The Tahoe Medical Co., Fitch was appointed general manager and sole agent for its only product – TAHOE KIDNEY CURE.<sup>(19)</sup> The company was incorporated in Reno, Nevada, on January 24, 1893, and received Federal Trade Mark No. 22,569 on February 28, 1893, which consisted of a monogram "T.M. Co."

Still living in Elko, he set up an office in San Francisco as the company's main headquarters. For most of the

**TAHOE  
KIDNEY CURE**

A PURELY VEGETABLE REMEDY.

**NEVER FAILS** to cure any affection of the Kidneys or Bladder.

**TAHOE MEDICAL COMPANY**  
**J. B. FITCH, Sole Agent Pacific Coast**  
**628 MARKET ST.**  
Opp. Palace Hotel, S. F.

When the Kidneys are healthy it is a preventive from all Contagious Diseases my7 SuWeff

Advertisement for Tahoe Kidney Cure which ran in the San Francisco Morning Call from May 7th to June 7th, 1893

**To Whom It May Concern.**

**J. B. FITCH IS NO LONGER AGENT** for the Tahoe Medical Co. in San Francisco, or elsewhere, and the public is hereby notified of that fact.

**W. R. CHAMBERLAIN,**  
Pres. Tahoe Medical Co.

de:im

Reno Evening Gazette, December 12, 1893

year Fitch went on the road to pitch the new product and to set up sub-agencies. Tragedy struck on November 9, 1893, when Fitch's wife, Julia Fitch, passed away in Elko. She was buried in the Elko Cemetery with a simple carved wooden marker so typical of small desert towns. Remarkably, that wooden slab exists today – still readable – but whitewashed to help preserve its rather delicate nature. Her death must have dealt a heavy blow to Fitch as he quit his new venture, and the Tahoe Medical Company soon languished and became just a memory. The company's president, Wm. R. Chamberlain, died in Reno on December 17, 1895.<sup>(20)</sup>

Without a job, Ben Fitch was likely living on his meager savings, but by the end of the following year he was broke. The Call noted . . . "J. Benjamin Fitch, dealer in patent medicines, has filed his petition in insolvency. Liabilities \$12,273, assets nil."<sup>(21)</sup>

14. Daily Alta California, March 30, 1875

15. San Francisco Call, November 19, 1876

16. *ibid.*, February 4, 1877).

17. Elko Independent, September 18, 1887

18. Rocky Mountain News (Denver, Colorado) February 9, 1893

19. Weekly Gazette Stockman (Reno, Nevada) March 16, 1893

20. *ibid.*, December 19, 1895

21. San Francisco Call, November 28, 1894



Ben Fitch's "golden years" were less than ideal. In 1896, at 65 years old, Fitch applied for the job of Superintendent of the Building of Schools, in San Francisco. The incumbent was Isaac P. Kincaid, who was expected to be re-appointed as his competition of four other candidates were not seen as strong. The exception was the fifth candidate, and the Call exclaimed . . . "It is not so, however, with Ben Fitch, a first-class mechanic of the old school, whose claim for precedence is getting a strong backing."<sup>(22)</sup> It was not to be, however; as Fitch was not appointed and he was not known to hold down a job after this date.

Ben Fitch's health began to wane after the beginning of the new (20th) century. Suspecting his end was near, Fitch gifted some property to his only known relative, his niece, the widow Mrs. Fredericka (Freddie) Bellemere, in December 1905.<sup>(23)</sup> She had a difficult life since 1883 when her jeweler husband, Augustus Bellemere, "accidentally" shot and killed his best friend, John Kelly, while in an alcoholic stupor.<sup>(24)</sup> The shame must have been difficult to bear for her. Fredericka moved across the San Francisco Bay to Oakland where she was employed as a servant but moved back to San Francisco in 1910 where she died on March 12, 1917.

The only positive element in the passing of Benjamin Fitch in San Francisco, on January 25, 1906, was for him to have missed the destruction of that city at the hands of the great earthquake and fire by 2 ½ months. Conversely, he would have delighted in witnessing the Montgomery Block, the only downtown survivor of the great catastrophe – that marvelous piece of San Francisco he had a hand in constructing.

#### End Notes:

Special thanks is extended to Toni L. Mendive of the Northeastern Nevada Historical Society and Museum for responding to my requests for information.

**A TWIABA bottle, set amongst the sage of the Nevada desert. A rare reminder of the many failures in life that so many have endured. In a strange twist of fate, this failure now represents a real treasure that the original proprietors could never have imagined.**

22. *ibid*, November 30, 1896

23. *ibid*, December 8, 1905

24. Sacramento Daily Union, July 23, 1883

