

Notes of an Interview with

William H. McHaney

by W. E. Ketcham and
W. Egbert Schenck

March 1933

Transcribed by Schenck
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National Park Service

Joshua Tree National Monument

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Statements made by him in March 1933 about the Twentynine Palms region
to
W.E. Ketchum and W. Egbert Schenck
and
transcribed in March 1952 by the later.

Bill McHaney was born near Gallatin, Davis County, Mo., March 25, 1859. He died at Keyes Ranch, Joshua Tree Nat. Monument ; and is buried in the Twentynine Palms cemetery.

He came west via the UP Ry and went to Tulare. He came south by team and was in Big Meadows, at the head of the Santa Ana River, in 1877. He was a cow-hand there and saw grizzly bears there. From Big Meadows to the desert down Mission Creek was considered to be 25 miles; and the cattlemen used this trail for their cattle to winter range on the desert. Bill was still a cattleman when he got as far as The Palms in 1879. He was at The Palms off and on from that time until 1933.

(Bill had a brother who had a bad reputation and who was also on the desert. But Bill did not say how or when he reached The Palms).

When he came antelope and mountain sheep were plentiful - particularly in the Deadman Lake region. The Windmill there was built by cattlemen in 1918. This game was eaten regularly. The last big sheep roast was in 1898.

in 1933 Bill lived in a wickiup in upper Musick Valley, Gold Park, and claimed he had lived there for 35 years.

In 1933 his sight was very bad and shortly before this interview he had picked up a 10-button rattler thinking it was a piece of rope.

Bill mostly prospected although at times he worked for others. He claimed that he and/or his brother first found several of the best early mines.

Below is the data he gave arranged under topics. We use Bill's term The Palms to indicate the general vicinity of the present Twentynine Palms Oasis. Comments in brackets are ours - not Bill's.

INDIANS.

SERRANO. Were at The Palms when Bill arrived. They painted the willows at the Inn. Told Bill of the spring at Pinyon Wells before 1881 - some 10 years before the mills were there.

PIUTES. Came about 1888; left 1909, after Willy Boy killed Indian Mike. About 40 Indians at The Palms in Piute Jim's time. Friendly. Lived on sheep, rabbits, mesquite beans, seed. Found all the old mines when hunting sheep.

Old Piute Jim Boniface. Never drank. Buried locally. Squaw was a Piute. (This could mean Boniface was a Serrano). 2 children. One, Annie, married Joe Pacheco.

Capt. Jim Pine. Never drank. Wore a stove-pipe hat and a lined duster. Had a collection of relics. Died in Palm Springs.

Jim Waterman. His father was a patient of a shaman from the north called Black Bill, a Piute. The father died. Jim then killed Black Bill and his squaw, horse and dog and destroyed his house. This was in Mission Creek about 4 miles from the so-called Mission. Bill saw Jim for the last time at The Palms in 1898.

Capt. Pacheco was the smartest and best liked Piute and one of the last to leave The Palms.

His son, Joe, married Piute Jim's oldest daughter, Annie. They were the last to leave The Palms. Lived at the Adobe. Joe drank and was thrown from his horse.

Willy Boy, about 30 years old, dressed well in a black suit and collar

. He wanted to marry Indian Mike's 16 year old daughter. She was not beautiful but big and fat. When Mike refused, Willy Boy shot and killed him.

Old Chepeven was the oldest Piute of all - over 100 years.

JONATHAN W. WILSON ("Dirty Shirt Wilson" and "Hard-rock Wilson"). was at The Palms from Jan. 1885 to May 15, 1914. He had an adobe and dug-out under the eastern palms by 1884 and that location was called Wilson Cove. Wilson was a good miner, knowing ores and values. In 1886 he located the North Star Mine, Gold Park; and got about \$1400 monthly by working 4 tons of surface ore. In 1893 he located the Mesa de Oro (a mine? where?). ("Wilson Canyon", the big wash from Stirrup Tank is named for him).

BILLY NEAVES. Built the Old Adobe (standing in 1933 in Wilson Cove) in 1888 with Jack Rankin. They built it for Baldrige & Gilmore who owned the "25 Mines" in the Bullion Mts. north of Twentynine Palms. (Between Bagdad Road and Deadman Lake). These men also put down the well at Surprise Spring. The Adobe was used as a store for the wagons hauling to Dale. In 1896, Billy with John Thurston built the rock house near Wilson Cove. This rock house became later the first school. Mrs Tucker (ex Mrs Norman Donnell, ex Mrs Ballou) brought out the first teacher who had a row with Mrs Tucker and left. Billy planted the fig tree near the Adobe, and some of the cottonwoods and willows at that end of the oasis. (The Serrano Indians planted some of those where the Inn now is. But Bill said there were very few trees besides mesquite and palms at the oasis when he came). The big willow at Wilson Cove was brought from Covington Ranch as a teamster's whip.

JOHN LANG. (There was a father and a son). In 1897 John Lang (the father?) had a saloon near Wilson's house. The whiskey was brought in. But at "Sneak eye", so-called by the Indians (a spring at the west end of the Indian Cove region) was a blind pig (Bill's term) run by John Stull for a short time. Stull used crutches and was a graduate of the Colorado School of Mines. Stull stayed about 5 years on "his first trip".

John Lang, the son, died in 1926. Two months later he was found by Bill Keyes who buried him at the spot where his grave still is on the road to Salton View (1952). Lang owned the Lost Horse Mine at one time with Jim Fife and Ed Holland. (3 men because of some feud with McHaney's brother one of the other side. Bill claims to have found this mine which might account for the feud). Ryan owned the mine in 1933. (*Dutch Frank Diebold found the mine. Lang filed on it in 1893. His partners were Ed Holland and Alfred G. Tringman, So Pac Agent at Indio. - Lura Cleveland*)

PHIL SULLIVAN. Mrs Sullivan was the first white woman to live here. Their children were the first to be born (??) here - in 1908, 1909. In 1910 Sullivan and Bill built an arastra near The Palms to work ore from Sullivan's Contact Mine.

A Mr Newton (who impressed Bill very much) came out with Sullivan to install and operate machinery in Gold Park "about 28 years ago". He was on the desert for a few months, then back in LA, then here again for several months. He came back "10 years ago" and again "last year". He had been made a colonel at 23.

BILL KEYES. Came in the Fall of 1910. Bill McHaney and his brother had been the first to settle on the location of Keyes Ranch. They ran cattle there and had a well with water at 20'.

MARTIN VIVIAN "a kind of preacher" died in Pinto Basin when travelling with a buck-board and burros. Bill had prospected with him for 3 years.

DRINKWATER of the Washington Survey Party first worked the Anaconda Mine. It was later owned and worked by a Mr Parks.

SAM JOYNER. (In 1933 one of the 2 inhabitants of New Dale and probably an ex-saloon keeper there. Known as the Mayor of New Dale in 1933) Born 1864.

C.W. POACH. Had claims in Gold Park. In 1920 Bill McHaney and Bill Keyes helped him build IVANPAH TANK