



## *This was Nevada Series*

Phillip I. Earl

### **The Single Men's Protective Association**

Proper, marriageable women were usually in short supply in the early days of most Nevada mining camps, but this imbalance in the sexes was usually rectified to some extent if a camp made the transition to a settled community. Such was the case with Pioche which had gained a reputation as the toughest town in the West by the mid-1870s. Churches had been established by that time, however, county officials had seen to the erection of schools and the Sheriff of Lincoln County had finally gotten a hand on the rowdiness which had marked the community's brief history.

The number of families had been on the increase for some time and each stage seemed to bring in more women of the type that a man might want to consider as a mate for life. Merchants welcomed this turn of events and community leaders took it as a sign that Pioche was at last becoming civilized, but saloonkeepers, gamblers and operators of brothels were considerably less than pleased. Several young bachelors had some reservations as an increasing number of their erstwhile drinking companions took the big step.

On July 8, 1876, the editor of the Pioche Record reported the recent formation of the Single Men's Protective Association, the object of which was to enable the members "to protect themselves from the encroachments of the female sex, which of late have become so dangerous that the poor male is getting to be an object of pity." In this same vein, he noted that the unmarried males of Pioche "are getting so timid that they hardly dare venture in the streets for a short walk for fear they will be married men before they can return."

At a second meeting held on July 11, officers were elected, each man assessed \$5.00 as dues and a resolution considered calling upon the members to "pledge to withstand the wiles of all females who should propose throughout 1876." A spirited debate ensued over the means whereby the men could aid each other, but nothing was resolved. Word of the gathering had circulated among the young ladies of the town and plans had been made to disrupt the proceedings, however. In the middle of the meeting, the doors were suddenly thrown back with a crash and in marched the women. Chaos ensued as they demanded to be heard, but the men were falling over chairs and tables as they scrambled to escape. One young miner stepped into a spittoon as he backed away and others dove for the windows. In reporting the incident, the editor of the Record suggested that his readers watch the wedding column for news of those who were not able to get away.

The whole camp had a good laugh, but the attack did not lead to the dissolution of the bachelors' group, although the Sergeant-at-Arms, Joseph R. Hoag, resigned because of a general dissatisfaction over his failure to provide proper security and his own disinclination to 'being knocked down and trampled upon by a swarm of indignant feminines," as he put it in his notice to C.H. Patchen, the club's president.

The next meeting was held on the evening of July 15, but the location was kept a secret. A new security chief was elected and president Patchen congratulated the members for their staunchness since there had been no defections to the wedded state in the past few days. The treasurer, Julius Hoffman, then made his report, confessing to being \$5.00 short in his accounts due to the events of the previous evening. This did not set well with some of the members and reasoned discussion soon degenerated into fisticuff, the men leaving the hall in an absolute shamble.

The Single Men's Protective Association apparently dis banded following this most recent example of disunity. It was not mentioned again in the Pioche papers, but the marriage tally lengthened as the months passed and the members probably fell one by one. Although serious in intent, the organization provided more amusement for the citizens of Pioche than help for those men designing to remain single, but then, amusement and diversion were often as important as more serious matters in early-day Nevada.

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