

Myth #33: Reno History Mystery Solved by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

Following the lead of Myron Angel's trailblazing *History of Nevada* (1881), many historians, journalists, and just about anybody with an interest in Reno's history concluded that 1863 was the year Myron Charles Lake established Lake's Crossing in Nevada Territory. As the story goes, the enterprising Lake traded his Honey Lake property in nearby California to Charles William Fuller for the land now occupied by downtown Reno. Fuller had arrived in the Truckee Meadows late in 1859, following the discovery of the nearby Comstock Lode, and by early the next year had built a hotel and a bridge across the Truckee River.



Other dates have been claimed for Lake's permanent move to Nevada, and included every year from 1859 to 1862. Ironically, the mystery could have been solved years ago by examining old newspapers. On June 29, 1861, Lake placed an advertisement in Virginia City's *Territorial Enterprise* with the headline "Bridge and Hotel at Fuller's Crossing." The ad ran for three months, noting Lake's purchase of the hotel and bridge that Fuller had built in early 1860. With many people traveling from California to the booming Comstock, Lake's most attractive selling point was the strategic location of the crossing. The transcontinental Central Pacific railroad connection and the founding of Reno would come in 1868, followed by the Virginia & Truckee railroad link to the Comstock in 1872.

Not long before his death in Reno, noted Nevada Artist Cyrinus B. McClellan depicted Lakes Crossing and Myron Lake in 1882 in an oil painting entitled "Reno 20 years ago." The historic illustration of the Truckee River crossing may have been McClellan's last work. Lake, who died in Reno in 1884 at the age of 56, has long been considered the town's founding father.

The lesson to be learned in this little vignette is that one should corroborate with primary documentation information gleaned from a secondary source whenever possible. For more than a century, people unquestionably trusted Myron Angel's *History of Nevada*, assuming virtually everything in the book was accurate because it was a revered, old history text.

A word to the wise: when studying early Nevada history you should start with Angel's book, but don't finish there! There is more homework to do!

Note: For more detailed information on this subject, see "Reno's First Robber Baron" by Guy Rocha in the March/April 1980 issue of Nevada Magazine.

Photo: Nevada State Museum

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, October 1998 edition)