

HERITAGE HAPPENINGS
Our Pioneers
In
Acton, Agua Dulce, Antelope Valley
and
Elsewhere, U.S.A.

By
Meryl Adams
of Acton

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1908-1922 The Sterling Borax Company, Industry And Mining Camp Of Soledad Township- Agua Dulce

A front page story appeared in R.E. Nickel's Acton Rooster Newspaper, dated October 15, 1908, as follows:

**\$1,000,000 CORPORATION ACQUIRES
VAST DEATH VALLEY AND ACTON
PROPERTIES.**

F.M. Smith, the borax king, is to have serious opposition in the field of commerce over which he has so long held solitary sway. A new \$1,000,000 corporation known as the Sterling Borax Company, has been formed and has acquired valuable properties in Death Valley, close to those which have yielded a fortune for Smith. It was announced that while the new company had not been organized for the express purpose of fighting Smith, it was intended as a formidable rival.

The new concern comes into existence in the form of a consolidation of the American Borax Company, the Stauffer Chemical Company, and affiliated corporations. The merger includes the Brighton Chemical Company, which is a branch of the American Borax Company, and the Frazier Borax Company, and Thomas Thorkildson and Company of Chicago, both of which in the past have been connected with the Stauffer Company.

At the very outset the new corporation has clashed with the Smith interests, both endeavoring to purchase the Borax Properties, Limited, an English concern, which recently took over the Palm Borate company.

The British company has begun the erection of a \$75,000 plant in Southern California to treat boric acid ore. When completed the plant will be able to treat 100 tons of ore in a day. By its acquisition either company would be able to add great strength to its position.

The Sterling Company has mines ten miles west of Acton, near the Robertson ranch, mines also in Ventura County and Death Valley.

The Sterling promoters claim that its fields are as large and rich as those owned by Smith. Its main office is located in the east. The directors, who are for the most part eastern capitalists, are as follows: Thomas Thorkildson, Charles de Guigne of San Francisco, John Stauffer, H. Matther, and E. Dawes and Myler of Pittsburg.

The borax industry of California has been an extremely profitable one for the last twenty years. The production for 21 years has been 767,469,000 pounds, valued at \$17,456,334. The production in 1890 was a little more than 6,000,000 pounds. In 1907 it had increased to 106,000,000 pounds.

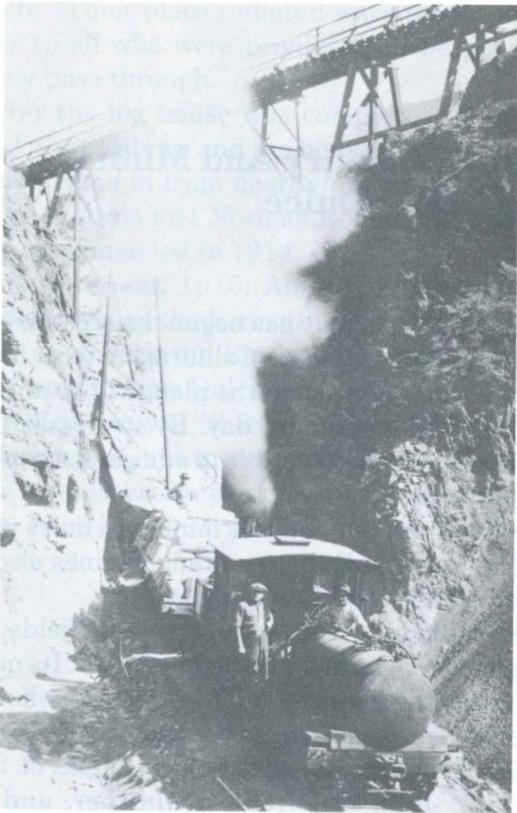
R.E. Nickel, Publisher of Acton Rooster Newspaper, and his reliable Local Editor, L.K. Rayburn, were informing the people of Acton, the ranchers and people in the Sierra Pelona Valley, near this new Borax development, of the activities as early as October of 1907, a year before the above reported article appeared and found its way to subscribers in every state in the United States!

Acton Rooster: October 15, 1907:

"A four-foot ledge of borax has been opened



Panorama view of the Pacific Coast Borax Mine in upper Tick Canyon, taken prior to 1923, when the mine closed.



Dinky bound for Lang Station with sacked borax. Ben Truex on the right.

CW

southwest of the Robertson Ranch. The company has ten men at work at present and will develop the same to the full extent.”

Acton Rooster: November 15, 1907:

“There is much excitement over the Borax discoveries near the Robertson Ranch. There is said to be a whole mountain of it, enough to buck “Borax Smith” in good shape. Emil Gipp and Henry Stroh are working there. The owner of the property has thirty men at work and they are building a road to Lang Station.” (Lang Station was destined to become the shipping point for borax as this highly successful Soledad Township Industrial operation developed).

Acton Rooster: December 15, 1907:

“There are now over sixty men and teams employed in opening the new borax mines near the Robertson Ranch. The borax is of the best quality and a large ledge. The company is building a short road to Lang, six miles all down grade.”

This story of Borax Mining in the Soledad Township will unfold as the employment roll increases to as many as 160 at times with most of the men from Sierra Pelona Valley, Acton, Mint Canyon, and Soledad Canyon. The Newhall “Boys” were busy working on the Newhall Oil Wells.

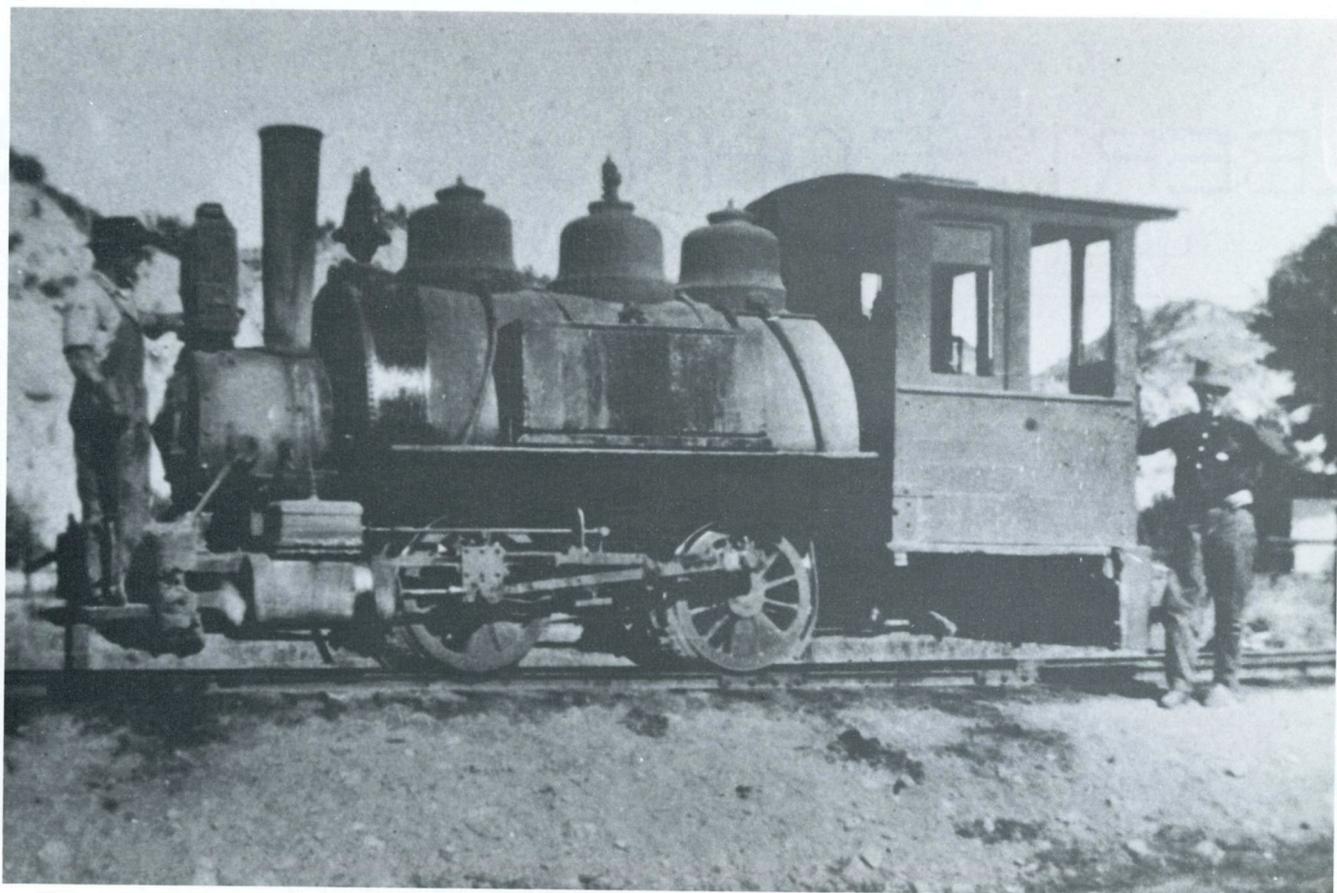


Machine shop gang at the Borax Mine in 1915, (l. to r.) Glen Wright, Falice Percivalle, Henry Hendley, Jim, and “Pop.”

CW



Train loaded with borax for Lang.



Ernest Moore Braheman on front of engine. Ben Truex, engineer.



CW

Borax Mine viewed down the canyon from the north.

ALBERT COHN — GROCER

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



MA

Supplies were ordered from Cohn Grocery in Los Angeles. (photo courtesy of Los Angeles Police Department Relief Association).



RS

Borax Mine Loading shed near the Santa Clara River.



RS

Borax Mine Loading shed and tracks near Slayton home and orchard.



FM-RM

Sterling Borax Mine—Agua Dulce.



FM-RM

Visitors at the Sterling Borax Mine—Agua Dulce.



Former employees and families of the Sterling Borax Mine. Photo taken at the home of Ben and Grace Truax.

MJW

1908-1922 The Sterling Borax Company—Part II

The Sterling Borax operation of Tick Canyon was good for Soledad Township. The 160 man payroll was the biggest in the area where Sterling worked more people than the rest of the township put together.

Plans for the many people and families involved with the operation of Sterling required expanded plans for housing, bunk houses for single men, cabins for married employees, commissary, cook-houses had to be good in order to hold the workers, food ordered once a month from Albert Cohn's Grocer in Los Angeles. These orders arrived at Lang Station.

The borax deposit had to be mined, timbering was required on a large scale to avoid cave-ins. The mining done after the timbering was provided involved working on three levels, 100 ft., 200 ft., and 250 ft. There was a shaft 50 feet farther down to provide for operation of drainage pumps. This was expensive.

The first locomotive used was too small for the job. The dinky pictured, was oil fueled, steam

powered, backed to Lang on the narrow gage railroad with heavy downgrade load, sometimes there was a run-away, not good for the tracks.

In 1917 the State Mining Bureau reported a Los Angeles County Borax Production of nearly half a million dollars, mostly from the Sterling Borax Company. This Bureau also listed the following: "Sterling Borax Co. controlled 1200 acres and mined a large deposit of colemanite. This crude material is separated from such impurities as clay and shale and calcin, then the borate is shipped to Pittsburg and Chicago to be refined into commercial borax.

The ore was crushed, roasted, sacked and loaded on the flat car for its trip on the narrow gage railroad to Lang Station, then on to refinement.

Families involved in this large operation were Glen Wright, Walter Baughers, Murphy, Harry Hendly, Ben Truax, Clarence Gerberick, Walter Murphy, Lillie Mayhue Hendley, Clara Long Wright, Bert McCormick, Frank Barr, Ernest Moore, Falice Percivalle, Stewart, Osborne and

Norman Ross Family from Alder Creeek—part of the “roll Call.” Also included were Leslie Wright and the Johnson men.

Every Saturday night there was a dance. The babies were taken along, gals prepared sandwiches, cakes and gallons of coffee. The musicians, fiddle, piano sometimes more quit at midnight, then the hat was passed and the fun continued until day-break. People came to the dances from Mint Canyon, Acton, Soledad, Sterling, Agua Dulce no matter where held. Places for dancing were School Houses, Agua Dulce, Mint and Soledad Acton. The Sterling commissary also was used on occasion.

The School Teachers spread the word, which meant the pupils served as messengers of the “dance tidings”. The crowd was always there, no one stayed home.

Favorite dances were Virginia Reel, Paul Jones, Rhy Waltz, Varsoviene, the Hesitation Waltz, the Waltz and the Barn. The building really shook

when the Barn was danced, but none fell down Bunny Hug and Turkey Trot!

When the dance was held in Acton if anyone missed a ride home the 5a.m. train at Acton would stop at Lang, then there was a wait for the Borax Mine Dinky and catch a ride, home to Sterling by noon.

Nearly 15 years of Operation, a profitable as well as a fun time in Agua Dulce Community life. The entire operation was dismantled by the end of 1923. Some of the Bunk Houses and Cabins were bought and moved to Newhall, at least six of them. Glen Wright bought three of the units for use on his Mint Canyon homestead.

Ben Truax and wife Grace held a reunion at their home in Agua Dulce with our picture section showing twelve families in attendance. The year is not known. We are sure happy memories were there of days at the Sterling Borax Mines in Tick Canyon.