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"The Rock Creek Ranch Story."

"Frenchy," A Rock Creek Ranch Stone Mason

By Jim Strong

An extremely worried mother walked slowly along the path, following her shadow which was beginning to fade away. She felt the cool evening air coming from the mountains so she began to draw her shawl closer. Her evening walk was not a happy stroll but a serious walk during which she must think. She hardly saw where she was going as she pondered what she should do. Mrs. Eraud (pronounced Ehroh) had already lost her husband and two sons in wars and her worry now was the safety of her last son. It was just before the turn of the century in 1896 and he faced conscription into the army. To her that meant the same fate for him as his father and brothers. Eugene Eraud had been born next to where the Swiss, Austrian and Italian Alps come together. As she looked up at the majestic mountains, she paused a short time, then suddenly turned around and walked briskly back. She had made up her mind. Her plan to save her son required drastic action and by her action she could not possibly dream that one-day he would be on the Rock Creek Ranch in Desolation Canyon on the Green River in Utah, a place no map at that time, especially in Europe, would even show.

She did what was almost unthinkable by putting her son all alone aboard a sailing ship bound for California far across the ocean. Her son looked over the railing of the ship and waved good by to his mother not realizing how she agonized at his departure. As the ship faded into the distance Eugene didn't know he would never see France or his mother again. He was only 16 years old.

He arrived in California in 1896 the same year Utah became a state. His mother had given him instructions to go to a town named Price, in Utah where he could meet a French family named Bouvier who years ago in France had been friends of his mother. People I talked to and who knew Eugene are not sure whether he ever met the Bouviers.

It took him nearly five years to work his way over the Sierra Nevada Mountains, across Nevada and half way through Utah to Price. He earned his livelihood as a sheepherder and along the way while herding sheep he studied rocks, specifically those with valuable minerals, because he found some gold. No wonder it took him five years!

My wife, Marjorie, and I traveled to Castledale, Price, and Wellington, specifically to learn what we could about this 16 year old boy who came from France and had been given the nickname "Frenchy." A nice white haired lady, Margaret Magnuson, the city recorder, in the city offices in Castledale and her co-worker, Caroline Jorgensen, the city secretary, were eager to tell me they remembered Frenchy. They were gracious enough to put me in touch with John Jensen, who had known Frenchy and had been with him when John was a boy. He, along with others, told me what they knew about Frenchy's life as they remembered it.

Rock Creek Ranch is located fifty-four river miles up the Green River from Green River, Utah. The distance is measured in river miles in Buzz Belnap's map of Desolation/Gray Canyons. The main ranch house was made of local sandstone and is gradually falling down after a fire destroyed the roof years ago. If you look carefully you will notice that the main house rockwork

is not as well done as the addition to the house which extends north toward the mountain and which still stands with a dirt roof over it. The addition is made over a dugout cellar and it has stone blocks matched and fitted far better than those of the main house. The edges of the blocks are superbly shaved and edged and fit to such a close tolerance that if you look along a joint line it is as straight today as it was when it was put together in the 1920's. River guides have a chance to show this superb rockwork that is still standing after so many years.

Rockwork on the main ranch building at both Rock Creek and down stream at McPherson's Ranch, is of inferior quality compared with the addition. Likely the same man did the rock work on both main ranch houses judging by the rocks are put together. I have taken people on raft trips passed Rock Creek ranch 216 times and until now never could tell them anything about who did the rockwork of the main house, the additional room, or the rock chicken coop. I could see a difference in the quality of the work but had no idea why there was a difference or who did any of the work. The rock creek ranch house masons have been a mystery just as who made the petroglyphs we see on the canyon walls. We now know who did such fine work on the additional room at the Rock Creek Ranch house, and who built the rock chicken coop on a ranch situated in such an inaccessible place, far from any town, and in such unknown territory.

A lot of the information I have gathered of what Frenchy did is circumstantial but much more comes from those who were with him and knew what he did. I have found a witness who, by seeing his picture, has confirmed that the mason for the addition and the chicken coop was Frenchy. Lou Downard told me his father learned from the Seamountains, from whom he bought the ranch, that a man called Frenchy had built the ranch house addition and the rock chicken coop. In the early 1920's, when the Seamountain brothers owned Rock Creek Ranch, they got in touch with Frenchy, at Rufus Wilberg's where they bought bulls for the ranch. In their dealings they got Frenchy to agree to build the addition to the main ranch rock house, and a rock chicken coop. The chicken coop still stands and no chickens ever had a stronger home. With his love for mountains, deserts and wilderness, places where he could spend time by himself it would not have been hard to lure him away to that part of the country to do that bit of work. The question arises though, how did he know how to do rock work if he left France when he was only 16?

There are three possible answers. The first is the most logical. The other two are possible but most likely fit in with the first. The apprenticeship way of teaching a young man a profession was successfully used in Europe during the nineteenth century. It is quite possible that Frenchy was apprenticed at an early age to a stone mason since he lived near the Alps and could have been working with stone before his mother put him aboard the ship for America. In the old country he would certainly see and would have been taught the ways of how to do the best type of rockwork. Or, Frenchy may have worked with rock in the Sierra Nevada mountains while he herded sheep; he could have learned a lot in five years which included learning to find gold. That would certainly have spurred his study of rocks. The third possible answer is Frenchy could have learned the art after he got to Price. According to Fred Wilberg, Frenchy was a very literate person who read much and learned things by himself. And being a ioner he could have practiced stone work and no one would have known about it. Fred said Frenchy was a self-taught mineralogist and he spent time prospecting in the mountains he loved. He herded sheep on Buckhorn flat for the Wilbergs where they had a homestead. He would have plenty of time to

learn the different rocks and to practice the art of shaping, edging and fitting rocks. No one I have talked to has suggested that Frenchy would not or could not be the mason on the rock creek addition. A cementing fact that Frenchy did the work is that Fred told me Frenchy talked about being over at Rock Creek on the Green River and that he loved the mountains there.

Frenchy was wealthy at one time and did own a ranch according to Edna Wilberg, wife of Rufus Wilberg. To own a ranch would account for two things: 1. From his finding gold he would have money to buy a ranch, but Gold, the magic metal of the ages, has been the making of some men and the downfall of others. 2. From owning a ranch, he would come into contact with ranchers of the area, but owning a ranch doesn't mean you have the ability to be a successful rancher. Apparently he lost or gave up his ranch and went to work for Rufus Wilberg on his ranch. The work he did gave him time to be in the mountains, and after herding or rounding up cattle he had time to search for rocks, and continue to do with rocks what he did when he came over the Sierra Nevada's. He prospected, staked some gold claims and even sold some of his claims. He prospected in the Prickly Pear area east of Castledale and even had a mine there. Frenchy said he wanted Kelley McClanahan to have it but to this day no one can find the mine. Kelley has died without having received any benefit from the mine.

John Downard and his son Manuel Downard who bought the ranch from the Seamountains also went to Rufus Wilberg in Castledale to buy bulls for Rock Creek Ranch. On a couple of these trips Lewis "Lou" Downard, John's grandson went with his dad to the Wilberg ranch in Castledale. Here he saw Frenchy and heard him talk. Lou, who lives in Coalville, Utah, identified both Frenchy and Rufus from the picture accompanying this article. [Picture from the Cyrus Wilberg collection courtesy of Linda Wilberg and John and Beverly Jensen] Manuel Downard and Luella, Lou's mother and father, took Lou to Rock Creek Ranch when he was only five months old. Lou lived there until he was eighteen. "When I heard him talk," Lou told me, "He sure did talk funny." Frenchy's French accent would certainly command a boy's attention.

I went to the cemetery in Castledale, Utah with John Jensen who had been the sexton for that cemetery for years. He showed me where both Rufus and Frenchy are buried in the same plot. Now only a white piece of stone marks Frenchy's grave but Fred Wilberg is going to place a gray sandstone headstone where the small white marker now stands. As we stood on the west side of the cemetery John pointed to the northwest up on the mountain so I could see where two significant places are located, Burnt Spring and Pine Creek. Wilberg's cowboys herded the cattle from Joe's Valley to Pine Creek where Frenchy would cook for them. Besides John, other young boys from age 9 on up like Gary Blackburn, now of Grantsville, Utah, and Elwood and Dee Miller of Castledale went on the cattle drives or herded the cattle and became acquainted with Frenchy.

Wilbergs had their headquarters down on the side of the mountain at Pine Creek where they had corrals and kept feed. But Frenchy preferred to stay at Burnt Springs some distance below Pine Creek. He would walk or scoot up to Pine Creek in time to fix the food for the cattlemen. He preferred to walk up to Pine Creek and never rode a horse up there. He cooked with Dutch ovens over an open fire and had a way of putting the meat, potatoes and vegetables in the Dutch ovens, then putting on the lids and covering them up with the coals so the meal would be done when the men came in. Frenchy would dig a three-foot deep trench in the ground and John and other

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young boys would have to cut sagebrush so Frenchy could burn it in the hole and line the bottom with coals. Frenchy and river guides have something in common because if a river guide could only take one cooking utensil on a trip he would certainly take a Dutch oven.

When Frenchy spent time in the mountains or the desert he lived in a tent. And when his supplies were gone he would walk to town for supplies or load up his two horses, like pack horses with a good supply of what he needed. He lived on venison and pheasants. He would trap the pheasants with chicken wire and a loop. John tells the story that one evening a game warden, one who would arrest "his own mother," came to the camp the herders had in the mountains just as they sat down to eat. Of course all they could do was ask him to join them. After awhile the game warden asked, "Say, what is it we are eating tonight?" No one answered. After a time he repeated the same question adding, "... what is this meat; its taste is familiar?" Again no one said anything. After the game warden had asked that same question a couple more times, one of the men at the table spoke up and said, "For Hell sakes Carl, eat your dinner and shut up!" The question was never asked again.

Frenchy had a knack with horses and cattle, but I have yet to find anyone who ever saw him ride a horse. That is strange since at one time he hunted donkeys for the government. When he was not working on the ranch, mostly in the winter, he loved to go out into the desert. He had a bunch of "colts" as he called them but they were really 10 to 12 year old horses that were gentled and who followed him around like pet dogs. Frenchy was skilled at many things but what seems important is whatever work he did, whether it was ranch work, stone work, carpentry, cooking or herding, all were extremely well done. According to Gary Blackburn, who now lives in Grantsville, Utah he made a sprayer out of wood to spray the backs of the bulls. You could suck water up into the sprayer out of wood to spray the backs of the bulls. You could suck water up into the sprayer which had a plunger and by pushing the plunger the wooden sprayer would send the water out in a spray. He had the bulls gentled so he could go among them just as he did with his "colts." However Carl Wilberg remembers an incident in which Frenchy wasn't so gentle. The Wilbergs who had bulls for sale as a part of the ranch business, had two bulls get into a fight. Old "Frenchy" went into the corral with a stick, and began whacking each bull on its head. He kept whacking them until he actually made them stop fighting.

Frenchy never married and never owned a home. His home was the desert or the mountains which may have reminded him at times of a far distant homeland. As he grew older he had a falling out with Rufus and went to work for By Johansen. By was a cattle rancher so Frenchy could easily work for him. He was good at ranching because although he was not a large man he was very strong. The Johansen home is on the national register and today is marvelously kept up. By built Frenchy a one room log house to live in on the back of his property in Castledale. (picture taken by author) He had a stove in it with which to cook and warm the place, but eventually things did not go well and he had a falling out with By. Frenchy went back to work for Rufus, who had a ten by ten-foot shack made out of two by fours built for him.

As Frenchy got older, he developed a toxic urinary problem. In February of 1952, Fred's mother, Edna, found Frenchy in distress. She got him into the car and stopped by the school to pick up Fred to help her. By the time she arrived at the school and picked up Fred Frenchy was semi-conscious. They sped on toward Price but as they approached the city, his breathing became irregular. As they hurried toward the hospital his breathing slowed and his life gradually

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ebbed away. The 16 year old boy who had been saved by his mother from death in war, so many years ago, died peacefully far away from his homeland but close to the mountains and desert in which he had spent much of his life. He left little to remember him by except a legacy of superb rockwork which only those who visit Rock Creek Ranch will see. For river guides, passengers, and anyone else who is privileged to see it, his rockwork has a message; whatever you do, if it is worth doing, it is worth doing well.

John Jensen stands in front of  
Frenchy's cabin

(1)

Peter "By" Johansen Home now a  
Utah Historical Site.

(2)

Frenchy's log cabin built for him  
by "By" Johansen.

(3)

Frenchy's log cabin with the Johansen  
Home in the background

(4)

Castledale Cemetery and mountain in background  
where Frenchy spent a lot of his time at  
Burnt Spring and Pine Creek

(5)

Rufus Wilberg's grave and headstone

(6)

Lewis "Lou" Downar lived on Rock Creek  
Ranch and knew Frenchy

(7)

White marker where Frenchy is buried in  
Rufus Wilberg's plot

(8)

Eugene "Frenchy" Eraud on the left  
and Rufus Wilberg

(9)

Thursday was my friend's  
when I was very young. he  
was living in the small  
house my father had built  
for him. I feel stretching behind  
the house on ~~center~~ center st. in  
Castle Dale.

He taught me the art of  
making snares to catch  
Rhesant-ant in the hay  
Patch. I got pretty good  
at it. It was nice to wander  
around & check my snares.

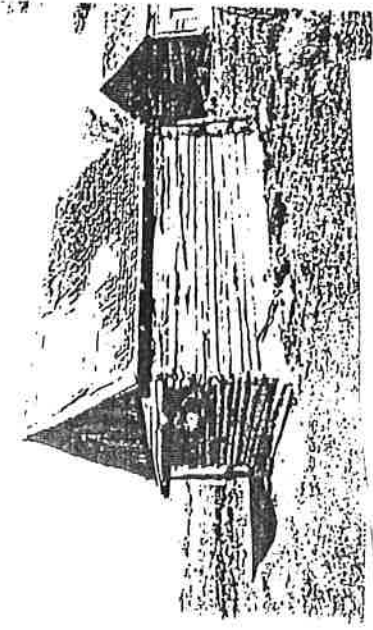
I did catch a few and more  
did try them for us. I put  
the ant on to my boys and  
I hope they have passed it on  
to grandsons.

Watch him on East mountain.  
all summer. Look for me &  
he will see & respect.

as to the fact the  
he never rode a  
horse. He always  
rode my horse  
when we went up  
"Tom's trail" & had  
to ride on back of  
Grave's horse till we  
got to the top then I  
got my horse back &  
he walked faster than  
our horse could travel,

Zora Johansen  
Fielder

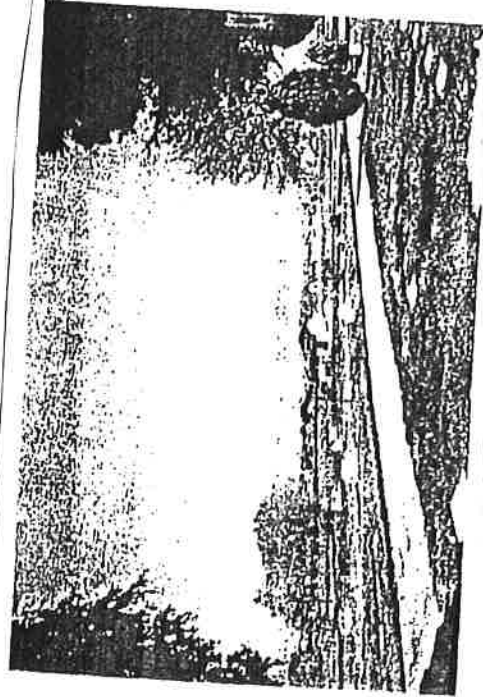




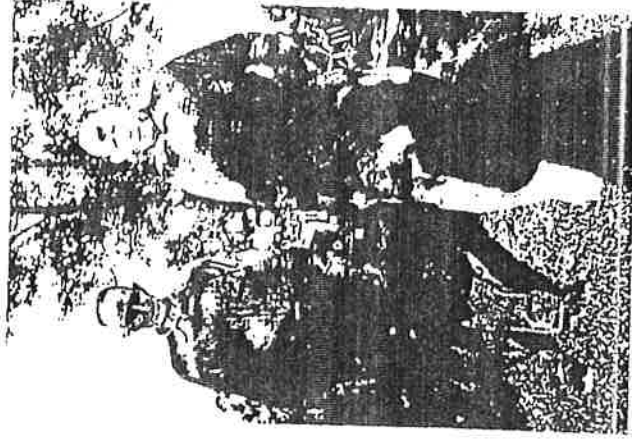
Frenchy's log cabin with the Johansen Home in the background



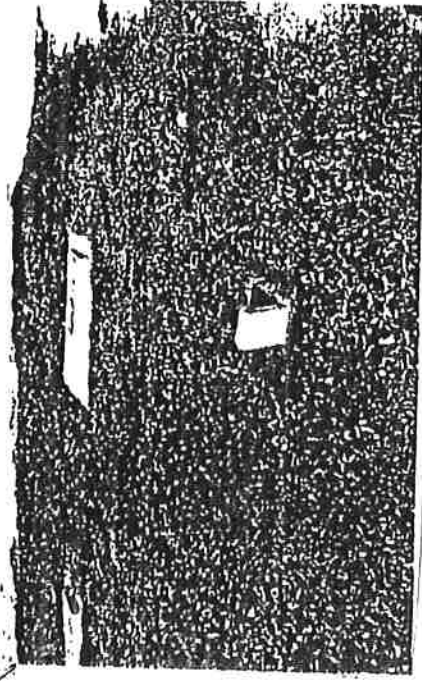
John Jensen stands in front of Frenchy's cabin



Castledale Cemetery and mountain in background where Frenchy spent a lot of his time at



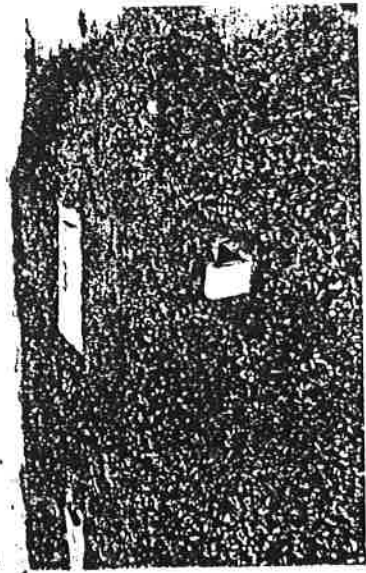
Eugene "Frenchy" Eraud on the left and Rufus Wilberg



White marker where Frenchy is buried in Rufus Wilberg's plot



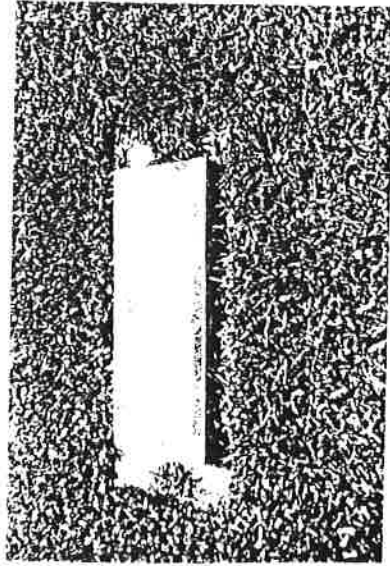
Peter "By" Johansen Home now a Utah Historical Site.



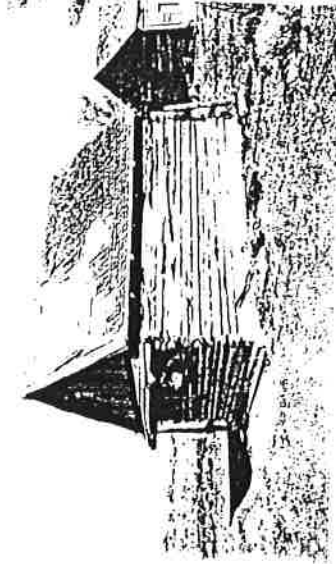
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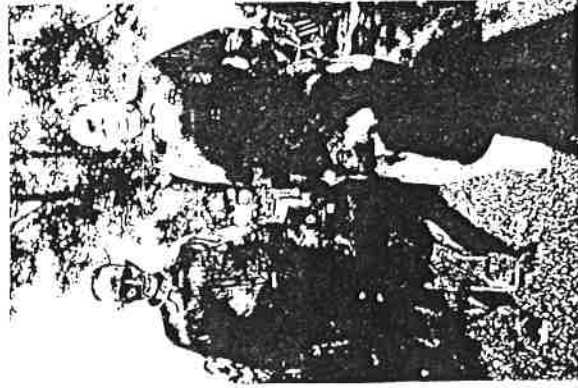
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Low Downard & Jim Strong



(6)



(7)

A FEW REMARKS ABOUT  
EUGENE EYRAUD (PROSPECTOR FRENCHIE)

Eugene Eyraud was born in Thautes, France in the French Alps a few miles from the Italian border. He landed in Los Angeles Harbor in the year 1880 when he was 12 years old. His Mother sent him to America so he wouldn't have to go in the army when his time came.

A Frenchman met him at the boat as was pre-arranged, and together they started driving a large herd of sheep--destination Soldier Summit, Utah. He told me he got so homesick coming across the desert he would get out of bed and walk away far enough so the older man couldn't hear him, and would then cry like a baby.

While coming through a mountain pass, the old Frenchman found a vein of lead and silver. He broke a sample off, and after they delivered the sheep in Soldier Summit, he had the sample tested in Salt Lake and found it to be high in silver. The assayer found a prospective buyer for it. Frenchie said the man sold it for \$25,000 and came back to Price and drank it all up, never giving his wife any part of it.

It took two years to deliver the sheep so he was now a man of fourteen. When he got to Price, he looked up an Italian family whose family lived only four miles from his home across the border in Italy. They gave him shelter and guided his life for a few years until he found jobs punching cows.

As the years went by, he was able to buy a ranch and stock it with cows of his own. It is not known when he sold his cows and ranch, but probably it was during the time when Madame Curie bought uranium in Greenriver and from the Temple Mountain area paying \$10 a pound for ore that would assay 10%. One of the bankers said he deposited a check for \$25,000 that had been sent from France. In any event he turned his life over to living in the hills with his horses. In the summer he would go up on East Mountain west of Castle Dale and tend his strawberry patch and live on deer meat. In the winter time he would live in the desert.

He found a showing of silver in Oilwell Draw, and Mr. Glassman who owned the old Huntington store grubstaked him to sink a shaft 40 feet deep. There he found about a wagon box of high grade silver ore which was the only silver ore probably ever found in Sinbad that was shipped to a smelter.

In his prospecting days he had, as I remember, four horses that were always rolling fat. I met him several times when he was headed for the mountains. He would want to stop to talk and show me a sample of ore that looked like there were tiny specks of gold in them. He told me he found a little gold in the Chlorides down at Lockhart Box and in Drowned Man's Hole, a big canyon that drains into Lockhart.

On East Mountain he told me he found gold high above the Wilberg Coal mine and over on Trail Mountain at Mud Springs. He said there was a big deposit of silver in Saddlehorse Canyon. He showed Ervin Wimber, Belmont Richards and myself what I thought to be a worthwhile deposit of Zinc. Years later Belmont Richards and I tried to find it, but couldn't. One day I asked him if he would show me again. He said, "You're just like that Goddamned Paul Judd--can't remember anything."

Frenchie found Mercury in holes in the limestone bottom of the Muddy River a few miles below Hondu. He told me of finding Selenium in the canyon of the Hondu. He tested for Mercury by putting the sample in a raw potato, then plugging it back and roasting it. If the rock had Mercury he would find a small bead of liquid silver-white Mercury in the inside of the potato. All his tests for minerals were crude, but were acceptable.

He carried an old book written in French with him, and I'm sure he had pretty well looked everything over by the time I became a prospector.

He loved his horses; they came first. He had berries and vegetables planted all over East Mountain. He smoked a corn cob pipe with a willow stem (home made), and he always had a hind quarter of venison hanging somewhere in the shade of a tree in a burlap bag.

He never married, and in his later years lived with Byron Johansen where he helped with the irrigation. He set wire snares in the cornfield for Pheasants and trapped more pheasants than the Johansens could eat.

Later he went to work for Rufus Wilberg, irrigating on the land that joined Indian Creek and Lowry Water.

Very few people ever knew his name. While I ran the service station he always cashed his checks with me. He never told people of his past or who he was unless they earned his trust.

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He paid his way all through life, and that's what made people so inquisitive about him. Everyone asked where he got his money. He told people he found a little gold here and there, but he never talked of big discoveries.

Frenchie, the Prospector, died in 1952, and he was remembered by the ones who knew him as an honest, decent man, a man who lived alone in nature the best way he knew how.

It was a sad day when the forest management wouldn't let him take his horse on the mountain any more. It was then he had to get rid of the horses that he loved so much.