



The “Petroglyph Cabin”

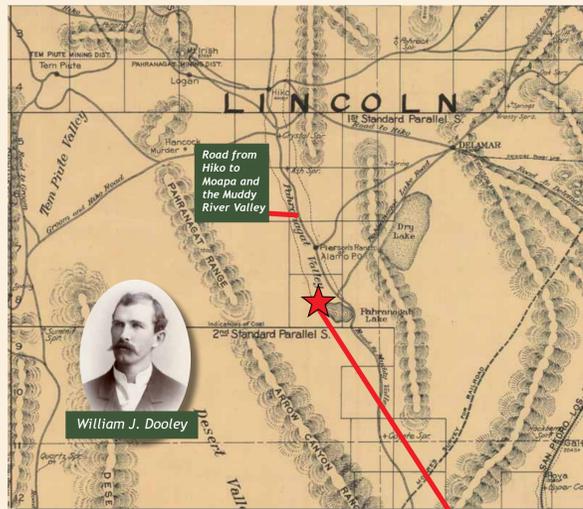
A Curious Building

This stout, well-crafted stone building seems out of place at the edge of a sparsely populated desert valley. What was such a distinctive building doing here? Who built it? And why? We don’t know, because the facts are incomplete. The building leaves us—like history does sometimes—with as many questions as answers.

Settling Pahrnagat Valley

Pahrnagat Valley’s mild climate and spring-fed streams and lakes created ideal conditions for agriculture. The valley’s first inhabitants were Nuwvi (Southern Paiute). They grew squash, corn, and melons in irrigated gardens, harvested native grasses, and hunted, fished, and gathered plant foods throughout the region. Euro-American settlement began in 1865, with the discovery of silver in the Mt. Irish Range and the founding of Hiko. Farmers and ranchers grew hay, planted orchards, and raised a variety of grains, fruits, and vegetables. Their cattle grazed on the valley floor and in the surrounding hills. Euro-American inhabitants numbered barely more than 100 until an influx of new residents in the early 1900s established the town of Alamo.

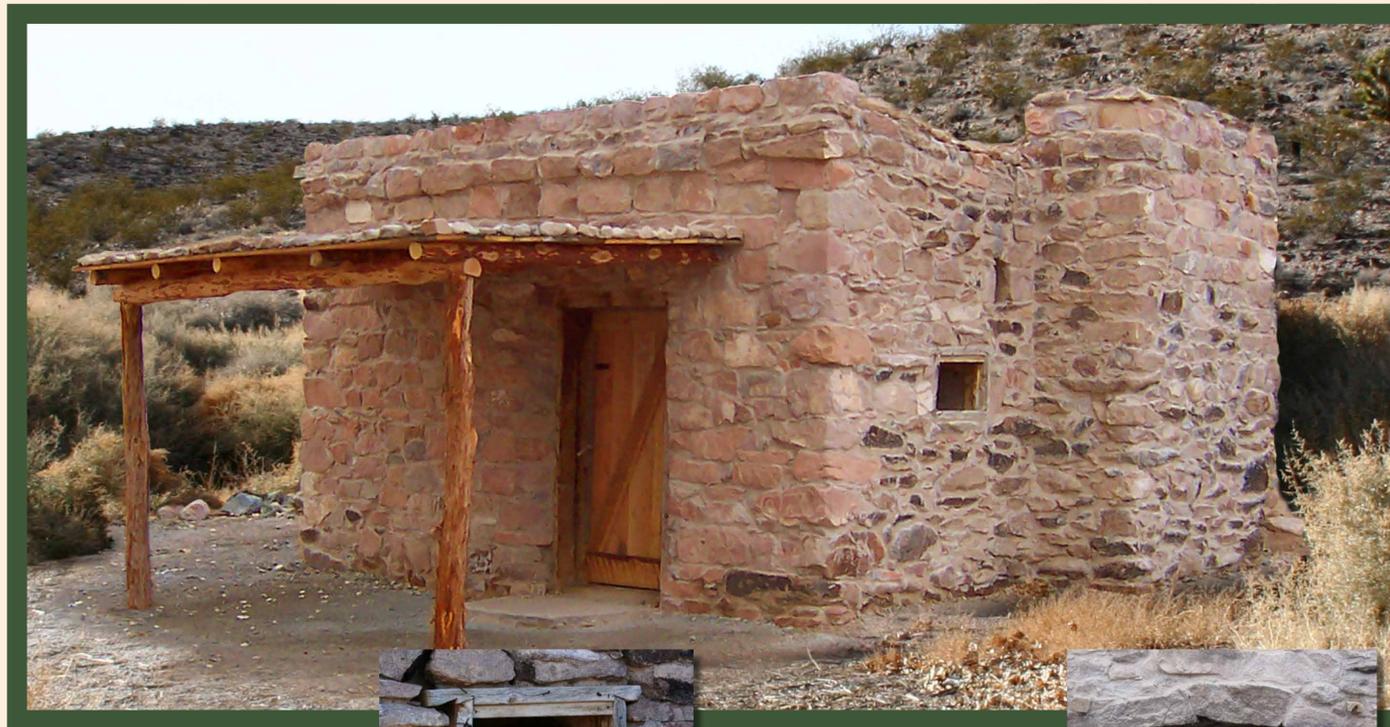
Mining booms at Pioche and Delamar from the 1870s through the early 1900s provided Pahrnagat Valley settlers with markets for their products.



Map and photo courtesy Special Collections, University of Nevada Reno Library

The Historical Record Tells Us...

The “Petroglyph Cabin” lies within a 120 acre parcel patented in 1890 by William J. Dooley, a prominent Lincoln County mining and political figure. There is no record of a building on the property. Dooley probably acquired the land as an investment, since he made his home in Pioche.



The window frames were shaped with hand tools and joined with unique triangular notching.



Photo by John Toso

The large fireplace and its imposing chimney were used for both heating and cooking.



Can you find the designs highlighted here?



Duplicate of the carved face that was stolen in 2001.

Mysterious Writing?

Some of the designs cut into the soft rock on the front of the building resemble Native American petroglyphs found in Pahrnagat Valley. The “writing” also includes initials and cattle brands. The meaning of the designs and their author, or authors, remain a mystery.

Crime Scene?

Stories have it that a prosperous Pahrnagat Valley cattleman named Fredrick Wallbaum—mistakenly remembered as “Fred Walden”—was murdered here in 1879. Wallbaum was indeed killed in his home, and his body thrown down a well. His ranch was located in the lower end of the valley, however there is no direct evidence linking Wallbaum to this location.

What the Building Tells Us...

The well-crafted stonework on the front of the building gives it an impressive, finished appearance. The beveled doorway opening and decorative course of rock crowning the front wall are marks of a commercial establishment. The building was probably constructed in the 1870s. Its small windows, single entrance, and thick walls provided security during the early, lawless day of Pahrnagat Valley.

Was It a Trading Post or Store?

The building has a loft for storage, and merchandise could have been hung for display from the horizontal planks embedded in the interior walls. But who were the customers? Only a handful of settlers ever lived in the immediate area.

Was It a Way Station?

Since the 1860s, the main north-south road through Pahrnagat Valley has passed half a mile to the east of the cabin. Would anyone have gone out of their way to stop here overnight, or for supplies? A later road taking travelers along the west side of Lower Pahrnagat Lake passed near the cabin.

Repair and Restoration

In 2009, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service restored the abandoned cabin to its original appearance. The project was supported by a Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act grant which also funded repairs to the tiny, railroad tie bunkhouse nearby.

