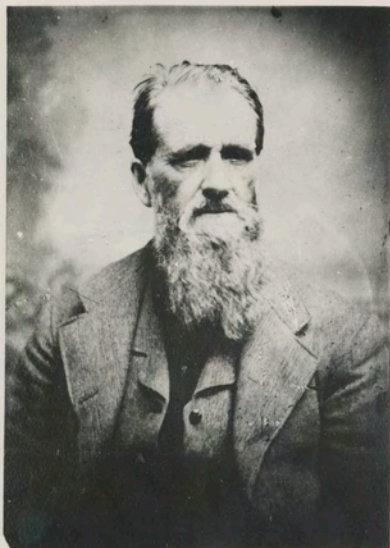


A Sketch of the Life of Aaron Denio

by

James. F. Abel

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Aaron Denio

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Aaron Denio, the founder of Denio, Oregon, was the son of Alonzo and Phebe (Bloss) Denio. He was born in Vermillion County, Illinois, on February 18, 1824. He had six sisters all older than he and one younger brother. When he was 12 years of age, in 1836, his father stirred by the boom in lead mining in southwestern Wisconsin, moved northward to Stevenson County, Illinois, and founded the little town of Oneco. Aaron grew to manhood in Stevenson County and adjoining Green County, Wisconsin. He lived in this section for 21 years rafting and flat-boating on the upper Mississippi River and mining.

He married Mary Emily Agnew and the first two of their children - Robert Alonzo (Bob) January 22, 1851 and Lavina Jane (Lou) September 21, 1852 - were born in Lafayette County, Wisconsin. The children's grandfather Alonzo joined in the gold rush to California and died about 1849 at Bear River.

Aaron at the age of 33 moved with his family in 1857 to the lead mines of Newton County in southwestern Missouri. A third child, Aaron James (Jim) was born March 31, 1859.

Mrs. Denio had contracted pulmonary tuberculosis and acting on the physician's suggestion that out-door living might be beneficial to her and prompted also by reports of rich gold finds in Jackson County, Oregon, Aaron joined a train of 35 wagons that started across the plains about the middle of May 1860. He was elected captain

of the train; James McQuin Dunlap, an ordained minister of the Christian church was its chaplain. A Cherokee Indian and his wife were the guides.

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The train, all or nearly all ox teams, moved slowly and usually covered not more than 12 miles a day. It laid over each Monday to allow the team animals to graze and the women to do the washing and baking for the week. It had been on the way only 3 weeks when Mrs. Denio died. She was buried on the plains somewhere in what is now Nebraska. The Reverend Dunlap conducted the services. The location of her grave is unknown.

Aaron was not long without a wife. On the following July 4 he and Mary Christeanna Downing, a native of Vigo County, Indiana, were married in a ceremony performed also by Mr. Dunlap. The minister's daughter Loretta, then 6 years old and still living at 93, wrote recently that the Captain was a number one man, kind and good to every one and with good judgment. At any rate under his direction the train made the six-months trip without really serious trouble either among its own members or with the Indians. In November they were at Pandango Valley, not far northwest of Cedarville, California, where they divided into groups some going further into California and others, Aaron among them, into Oregon. His stay there must have been short, probably less than a year.

The Comstock Lode in western Nevada was then beginning to be known as one of the world's greatest silver deposits and Virginia City was booming. The Ophir Silver Mining Company, owners of the

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Ophir mine - the first and perhaps the richest of the Comstock - had hundreds of men in late 1860 and early '61 building large works to reduce the ores. The town of Ophir was laid out for the mine's employees and grew rapidly. The townsite company built and donated a good schoolhouse to the newly created Ophir City. Aaron had already come into this area from Oregon and he, George H. Douglas and H. H. Beck were elected the first school trustees. Bob and Lavina attended the school. For a while, Aaron, T. G. Hegus and David Stage operated a saw-mill in nearby Washoe Valley. The fourth child in the family, Emily Jane (Jennie) was born at Ophir, April 13, 1862.

Another mining boom attracted his attention. This time it was in the Humboldt Range of mountains where rich silver ore was found in 1860 and Humboldt City, Unionville, Star City and Dun Glen were growing into towns that might, so the miners thought, surpass Ophir, Virginia City and other settlements near the Comstock. Late in 1862 or some time in '63 Aaron moved eastward up the Humboldt River and stayed a short while at Unionville, then went on to Star City only a few miles distant. He and several of his friends were small stockholders in the American Basin Gold and Silver Mining Company which had its offices in Virginia City and held three groups of claims in Star Basin. While at Star City he may have been working with and for this company.

Some of the prospectors that went north from Unionville and Star

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City returned with stories of having found a large, fertile valley with deep, black, loamy soil like that of the prairies of Illinois, well watered, abounding in fish and game, and so beautiful that they named it Paradise. Aaron hadn't been very successful at mining; Star City was already on the down grade; soil like that of his native Illinois prairies must have had a strong appeal and in April of 1864, he and his son Bob went to the valley. He located a farm in the natural meadows of its central part near the east bank of Martin Creek on land that was later known as the 96 Ranch. He built a small sod house with thatched roof, made a willow corral for his few head of stock, cut a small amount of hay and began an irrigation ditch to divert water from the east side of the stream. Mrs. Denio and the younger children were still at Star City and the fifth child in the family, William Price (Will) was born there on July 31, 1864. He moved all the family to the farm in September.

They were there on the morning of April 5, 1865 when a band of hostile Shoshone and Piute Indians attacked the valley in an attempt to kill or drive out all the white settlers. He, his family and a few companions barely succeeded in reaching a temporary place of safety in a stockade of cottonwood poles known as Hamblin's Corral about 3 miles from his home.

Within the stockade were Aaron, his wife, the 5 children - Bob, Lavine, Jim, Jennie and Will - Lon and Jeff Bryant who were nephews of Aaron, Jacob Huffard and his wife, Mrs. Stockham, John Lackey,

Waldron Foster, Tom Byrnes, Tom Pine, -----Rembreaux and ----- Barber. Ten, men, one boy (Bob was 14 years of age), three women and four children surrounded by at least 75 hostile Indians. By common consent Aaron assumed command. Their weapons were 3 ordinary rifles, one musket, two double-barreled shot guns, and one navy and five small Colt's revolvers. The Indians kept up a fairly constant shooting with guns and bows and arrows. The whites made no reply in kind; they waited to do concentrated firing at short range if the savages made a direct charge. The situation was hopeless unless help could be had before night came.

Tom Byrnes volunteered to go for aid. He saddled and mounted one of the horses in the stockade and was promptly bucket off. He mounted another and succeeded in riding through the ring of Indians without injury to himself or his horse. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon he was at Willow Point fourteen miles away where he found a party of thirteen men who were going to the mines at Silver City, Idaho. They immediately gathered their horses and guns and raced back with Tom to the stockade where they arrived about dusk. The Indians held a hurried consultation and withdrew north through the valley killing stock and destroying property as they went. Aaron's house and corral were burned and his oxen, cows and horses killed. The settlers and the rescue party after a meal of flapjacks made their way slowly through the darkness to Willow Point.

Aaron and a few others, determined to raise a grain crop that year, formed a colony for mutual protection and returned to the west side of the valley; a second small colony moved to the east side. The Indians numbering twenty-seven or more came again on July 26. Meanwhile Lieutenant Colonel Charles McDermitt had stationed Sergeant Thomas of Company D, Nevada Volunteers, with a corporal and sixteen soldiers in the valley to protect the farmers. The troops aided by some of the settlers, Lon Bryant and Bob Denio among them, attacked the Indians, drove them into the high grass and willows along the creeks and in a fight that lasted several hours killed twenty-four. A few escaped to the hills. Some of the whites were wounded and Joe Warfield was killed.

Aaron was a citizen and resident of Paradise Valley from that year (1865) until 1874. In the winter of '65 - '66 he bought an interest in Willow Point Station and became a partner of G.A. (Alex) Middleton. There his sixth child Mary Christeanna (Mary), named for her mother, was born February 20, 1866, the first white child born in the valley. Years later her sister Lavina wrote:

Monday the 20th

This is Mary's birthday. She is 63. Born on the bank of a muddy slough in a shack made of willows and mud, with a rye grass roof and a dirt floor. The medical attendant was an Indian (Digger) squaw, Will Muffler's Mother.

That summer Denio and Middleton built a new station northwest of the "shack" on the slough and out of the flat where it would be

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more convenient for Hill Beachey's stage line to Silver City and for travelers to and from Idaho. Aaron grew to feel that Mr. Middleton was not trustworthy and early in December 1866 he dissolved the partnership, moved north to the upper end of the valley, lived for a while in rented houses, and in the fall of 1867 built a adobe house on land that later became part of the Hinkey Ranch about a mile north of the present little town of Paradise. During that summer he was one of the active workers in bringing about the erection of a flour mill near the mouth of Martin Creek Canyon and aided in an unceccessful attempt to have a road built from the valley directly northward to Silver City, Idaho. He brought the first mower and reaper into Paradise and was half owner of one of the first threshing machines.

The winter of '67 - '68 was very severe. Rain fell all during the holiday week. It was followed by clear, cold weather with the thermometer at night falling to 10 and 15 degrees below zero. The week of January 6 to 11 was one of almost continuous snowfall that covered the valley with a white blanket two feet thick.

On Sunday January 12 (1868), in that arctic setting, Aaron's wife gave birth to twin children, a boy and a girl. The boy baby died; the girl lived and was named Eunice. The following Friday January 17, Mary Christeanna (Downing) Denio died, 35 year 6 months and 20 days of age. A friend wrote of her that she was a loving wife, a tender and affectionate mother and a kind and

charitable neighbor. The care of the five younger children fell mainly on Lavina fifteen years old.

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Aaron was at the Hinkey Ranch two years, then sold it and moved six miles south to the John Glassgow place on Pole Creek. While there he and his third wife, Mrs. Johanna Fox a school teacher, were married on March 20, 1870. The ceremony was performed at the Colony Ranch by the Reverend Trousdale. His daughter Lavina and David A. Abel were married at the Glasgow place on April 16, 1871 and in the fall of that year Mr. Abel bought the ranch from his father-in-law.

A piece of land half a mile wide and a mile long (320 acres) extending along Martin Creek were Aaron first settled and from which he was driven by the Indians was still in his ownership. He built a home there and took his family to it. There they lived two years.

He then bought the Curtis & Lovett Toll House twelve miles from Winnemucca and on the north edge of the belt of aeolian sand that stretches across the lower part of Paradise Valley. Withit he acquired title to the Curtis & Lovett Toll Road four miles in length through the sand hills. There his last child Richard Lindsey Fox Denio (Lindsey) was born on February 11, 1874. Five days later he and J. B. Merchant filed notice with the county recorder that they would build a second toll road beginning where the Little Humboldt River emerges from the sand belt and running south directly

over the ridge that extends east from Winnemucca Mountain. Such a road was constructed but the records do not show that they did it. Their plan may have been carried out by others.

Mines again attracted him and that year he went to Bartlett Creek and either located or purchased an interest in the Badger Claim. Seemingly this was a losing venture for on October 21, 1875 he and LaDue Vary deeded to Eli Reinhart of Winnemucca a 5-stamp quartz mill on the north side of Bartlett Creek together with the water rights and fifteen hundred feet of the Badger Mine on the south side of the creek. This was to be security for an indebtedness totaling \$8,596.67 which he and Mrs. Vary had contracted with several persons and which Mr. Reinhart was to assume.

On the same date he sold the Toll House and the toll road with its franchise to Ben Reinhart for \$5,000. Much against his wife's wishes, on February 17, 1876 he sold the 320 acres of land on the 96 Ranch for which he had a State Patent to J. J. Alexander and L. Alexander of Virginia City, Nevada, for \$2,000.

We have little record of how long Aaron lived at Bartlett Creek, or Varyville as the town was named, when he left there, and what he did in the years from 1876 to 1885. With the exception of Lindsey, the younger children lived with and were cared for and educated by Lavina and her husband Mr. Abel in Paradise Valley.

Jim Denio, a constant and close companion of Mr. Abel, was riding a half-broke mule in the street of Paradise one winter day

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and a hoodlum threw his hat at or under the animal. It reared and fell backward on Jim injuring him mortally. The physicians who were called could do nothing more than alleviate his suffering. He died January 6, 1879, aged 19 years 9 months and 5 days.

In the fall of 1885 Aaron with his wife and their son Lindsey was living at the Mapes Place a short distance north of the Oregon-Nevada State line in Pueblo Valley. He was building a large sod house with a wide, open fireplace near the mouth of a deep canon not far to the west. The house at the Mapes Place had a thatched roof and leaked badly in the September storms. The discomfort convinced him that he should shingle the roof of his new home and he did. He tried to dig a well but failed. Later he tunneled into a clay outcropping on the mountain side and developed water enough to pipe for comestic purposes.

There Aaron lived, farmed, mined and ran a station for the final twenty-two years of his life. Denio Station grew into a small settlement. The Post Office Department opened an office there on June 9, 1897 with him for its first postmaster.

When the clock had told off only seventeen minutes of the day designated as January 27, 1907, he died in his sod home. An attack of influenza and its complications closed his life twenty-three days before the eighty-third anniversary of his birth.

One of his close friends, J. W. Cowden, wrote of him as a "man of the most indomitable will, vital power and generosity to his

friends whom I have ever met", and added, "At his funeral there was the largest concourse of people ever assembled in Pueblo Valley on such an occasion".

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Note - The accompanying photograph is a reproduction of a tintype picture of Mr. Denio. The date of it is not known. The facsimile signature was taken from a letter he wrote November 16, 1888, to Herbert W. Denio at Montpelier, Vermont.

James F. Abel
120 West Third Street
Winnemucca, Nevada
November 30, 1947

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This statement is intended to supplement and bring to date the information about Lindsey F. Denio listed as No. 994 on page 159 of "A Genealogy of Aaron Denio of Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1704-1925" by Francis Brigham Denio and Herbert Williams Denio, published by the Capital City Press, Montpelier, Vermont.

Richard Lindsey Fox Denio, born at the Toll House, near Winnemucca, Nevada, February 11, 1874, was married on September 29, 1897 at Winnemucca, Nevada, to Dolly (Edna Maude) Akins, born at Valmont, Colorado, February 9, 1886. Dolly Akins Denio died at Denio, Oregon, December 18, 1905 and is buried there. Richard Lindsey Fox Denio died at St. Helena, California, November 11, 1936 and is buried at Kelseyville, California.

Their children all born at or near Denio, Oregon, are:

Bonnie Joanne Denio	August 4, 1898
Linnie Dean Denio	March 10, 1900
Orphey Aaron Denio	September 15, 1901

Bonnie Joan Denio was married June 18, 1916 at Kelseyville, California, to Fred Henry Norton born at Brooks, California, on July 27, 1894. Their present address is Kelseyville, California.

Their children all born at Kelseyville are:

Howard Denio Norton	November 3, 1917
Floyd Frank Norton	November 22, 1922
Russell Fred Norton	February 18, 1925

Linnie Dean Denio, not married. Present address is Rio Vista, California, Care of Church Bros. Ranch.

Orphey Aaron Denio was married March 20, 1926 at Stockton, California, to Vergie Belle Herren, born at Jennie Lind, California, on December 21, 1907. Their present address is 524 East Oak Street, Lodi, California. They have no children.

Howard Denio Norton was married December 11, 1938 at Nice, California, to Eunice Audrey Booth, born at Mill Valley, California, on November 23, 1921. Their present address is 6026 Harwood Avenue, Oakland, California.

Their child born at Lakeport, California, is
Carol Lynn Norton December 8, 1939

(Compiled by James F. Abel, December 24, 1940, from data furnished by Bonnie Denio Norton.)