by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist and Dennis Myers, Journalist

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In 1979, Houston Oil & Mineral, a mining company, expanded an open-pit gold mine near Virginia City which threatened the destruction of much of upper Gold Hill. Comstock residents fighting the mining company said the property was so historic and hallowed it was depicted on the Nevada State Seal. The basis for the claim -- sometimes repeated by state politicians -- is a railroad "trestle" appears on the seal, and the Crown Point Trestle on the Virginia & Truckee (V&T) Railroad had been located in upper Gold Hill until it was dismantled in 1936 and the Crown Point Ravine filled in.

Ty Cobb, a Virginia City native and long-time Reno newspaper reporter named for the colorful and controversial Detroit Tigers baseball player, helped his father tear down the engineering wonder. Cobb, in a story appearing in the *Reno Evening Gazette* on July 15, 1936, wrote that the Crown Point bridge, "one of the most historic structures in the West... is pictured on the official seal of the state of Nevada." He repeated the claim in his article, "Nevada's Crown Point landmark," published in the *Nevada Official Bicentennial Book* (1976). Cobb confided in me shortly before his death in May 1997 that one of his teachers at the Fourth Ward School in Virginia City, where he graduated from high school in 1933, told him that the Crown Point Trestle was depicted on the State Seal.

"When the V&T suspends operations there will go out of existence not alone the last of the

glamorous passenger carrying short line railroads of Nevada" wrote Comstock promoters Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg in *Virginia and Truckee: A Story of Virginia City and Comstock Times* (1949), "but also an institution so important in the state's economy that its representation is an integral part of the Great Seal of Nevada. The trestle remains only in memory and in reproachful immortality in the Great Seal."

The claim is widely accepted in Nevada, but there is no truth to it. The state seal was originally designed in 1863 during the first constitutional convention in Carson City, slightly modified during the second constitutional convention in 1864, and adopted by the state legislature in 1866. The structure on the state seal is made of stone and is more properly called a viaduct. Work on the V&T and the Crown Point Trestle constructed of wood, did not begin until three years later in 1869.

Actually, it makes a better story this way. After all, when the viaduct was first depicted in the seal, there were no steam-powered railroads at all in Nevada. The Central Pacific Railroad did not arrive until December 13, 1867. Its inclusion by lawmakers in such an important state symbol was an act of faith in Nevada's future, knowing the nation's first transcontinental railroad would run through the heart of the Silver State. In fact, Nevada's First Territorial Legislature in 1861 approved a bill granting the "Big Four" the right to build a railroad across Nevada from west to east.

And upper Gold Hill -- with its elegant Gold Hill Hotel, historic Greiner's Bend, and V&T railroad depot -- survived the onslaught of the mining company when, with the price of gold in decline, it closed down its operations in the early 1980's.

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, August 1996 edition. Reprinted March 2004)