

by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

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You can't miss it if you are driving on State Highway 342 between Silver City and Virginia City. The site is Greiner's Bend, a challenging switchback in upper Gold Hill where you need to slow down to a crawl to navigate the narrow, two-lane road before you reach the Divide and the "Queen City of the Comstock".

So why do so many people call it Grinder's Bend? As the story goes the location was given that name because you could hear all the vehicles over the years grinding their gears while negotiating the severe, incline S-curve. While it is true that autos, buses, and trucks were heard to grind their gears while shifting, the bend is actually named for John (1868-1917) and William Greiner (1871-1949) who spent most of their lives in Gold Hill. The quaint Greiner house can still be found near the base of the bend.

Some writers erroneously state that the 19th century name of the switchback was Greiner's Bend. If the bend had a name then, it has been lost in time. The name Greiner's Bend on Main Street near Bullion Ravine was applied sometime after 1900. Alfred A. Wills and his wife, the former Annie Greiner, lived in the house at the bend in upper Gold Hill following their marriage on September 23, 1890. When the Wills family moved to San Francisco in about 1906, John and Will Greiner, who had been living with their sister's family, stayed on in the house. Comstock old-timers like Hugh Gallagher and Don McBride--both dying in 2006--remembered as children in the 1930s the S-curve referred to as Greiner's Bend.

Louise K. Greiner, and her three young children, John, Annie, and William found their way to Gold Hill from Brooklyn, New York in the mid-1870s. The family first shows up in the 1875 Nevada Census. Mrs. Greiner, a native of Wurtemberg in Germany, married John H. Witte, also from Brooklyn, in 1877 and started a second family. The blended family lived at 7 Bowers Grade in upper Gold Hill.

John Witte died in 1883 at the age of 37 leaving Louise to raise five children. She died in 1903 in Gold Hill. They are buried in the Virginia City cemetery next to their son Henry Witte who died at the age of 6, shortly after his father's death.

John Greiner was 49 when he died at his home on Greiner's Bend from typhoid fever on September 17, 1917. He had spent his adult life working in virtually every mill on the Comstock.

Will continued to reside in the house at Greiner's Bend after his older brother's death. Will Greiner worked as an engineer and carpenter for many of the Gold Hill area mines. He was also a long-time Mason and served as master of Silver Star Lodge No. 5, F.&A.M., in 1906 and 1907. He received his fifty year membership pin in September of 1948.

Will served faithfully in the Gold Hill Volunteer Fire Department, and Steven Frady, in his work *Red Shirts and Leather Helmets: Volunteer Fire Fighting on the Comstock Lode* (1984), mentions his long service. Frady recounts that Greiner's showcase residence barely survived the great conflagration of November 13, 1942 that ravaged most of the Divide, the fire burning to the rear of the Greiner house before it was extinguished. According to Will Greiner's obituary in the November 28, 1949 edition of the Nevada Appeal, "[h]is home at Greiner's Bend above Gold Hill was a show place of the area because of his beautiful front yard he maintained."

Lest we forget, John, Annie, and Will Greiner's house remains on the switchback known as Greiner's Bend as mute testimony to the Gold Hill pioneer family.

Note: a photo of Gold Hill in 1867 shot by Timothy O'Sullivan, photographer for the Clarence King Survey, depicts the switchback. See the George Eastman House webpage: [http://geh.org/ne/mismi3/m198118860002\\_ful.html](http://geh.org/ne/mismi3/m198118860002_ful.html)

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, September 2002)