by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

Lemuel Sanford “Sandy” Bowers was many things to many writers. Virtually all we know about Sandy Bowers, believed to be the first Comstock millionaire, was written after his death at Crown Point Ravine in Gold Hill on April 21, 1868.

Editor Myron Angel in his *History of Nevada* (1881) characterized Bowers as “an ignorant, easy-going frontiersman . . . .” An anecdote--probably apocryphal--in the pioneer history makes the Gold Canyon miner appear to be a lucky, good-hearted buffoon who just happened to strike it rich in 1859 and frittered away his fortune with his wife and business partner “Eilley”.

In editor Hubert Howe Bancroft’s *History of Nevada*, 1540-1888 (1890), we find that Bowers was an “illiterate Irishman” who married Scottish-born Allison Orrum Cowan in 1858. Actually, the couple was married on August 9, 1859, shortly after the major discoveries at Gold Hill where they had adjoining claims. “The Bowers became famous alike for their riches and their ignorance of their uses of wealth,” according to Bancroft’s work, and reference is made to a trip

the couple took to Europe where “they remained three years abroad.”

The voyage to and from Europe, wrote Grant H. Smith in The *History of the Comstock Lode*, *18 50-1920* (1943), lasted only eleven months. Smith, citing Eilley’s testimony in an 1865 court case, noted that the Bowers left San Francisco on the steamer *Golden Gate* on May 1, 1862, returning to Nevada Territory in April 1863. He referred to the couple as “. . . simple, unlettered folk . . . .”

Swift Paine, in his work *Eilley Orrum Queen of the Comstock* (1929), wrote of Sandy Bowers in 1859 that he “. . . had come from Missouri several years before as a teamster”, was “[s]pare, boyish, unlettered, [and] given to roistering . . . .” Paine later admitted to taking great liberties with the facts and inventing conversations and events for dramatic effect.

In a modest biography of Eilley Bowers entitled The *Mistress of the Mansion* (1950), author Alice B. Addenbrooke described “Sandy” as “enterprising . . . although uneducated.”

Perhaps the most sympathetic account of Lemuel Bowers is found in *An Editor on the Comstock Lode* (1936) by journalist Wells Drury. Drury interviewed Dr. Simeon Bishop, his own father-in-law and a close friend of the Bowers. “’Two better people than Sandy Bowers and his wife never lived, exclaimed Dr. Bishop . . . They were plain folks, both of them, though she was somewhat more pretentious than he’.” Dr. Bishop continued that “[h]e was a frontiersman; his ancestors had been pioneers of Kentucky. . . . He was a gentleman without trying, and without knowing why.”

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