by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

Few people have heard of Vya and fewer yet have visited the remote location in northern Washoe County. There certainly hasn't been much written about the place. In 2004, a guest ranch known as the Old Yellow Dog Ranch & Cattle Co. opened in what is known as Long Valley. Maybe it's time to learn a little more about the founding of the settlement, Vya Wimer, and the claim that she was the "first white child born in that vicinity."

This northwestern corner of Nevada was originally Northern Paiute country. Politically it was Roop County from Territorial times to 1883, when it was consolidated with Washoe County. The land was principally devoted to stock raising: the famous Miller & Lux outfit had interests in the region, and there was some prospecting and mining in the vicinity of Bald Mountain. The closest towns were Cedarville, Lake City, and Ft. Bidwell in Surprise Valley, Modoc County, California. As might be expected, a number of the first Vya-area farmers found their way there from nearby Modoc County when the federal government opened Long Valley for homesteading in the early 1900s.

The 1910 U.S. Census listed 15 households and 96 persons living in the newly created Bald Mountain Precinct. Among them were brothers Guy and Roy Wimer living on their adjoining farms. Both were born and raised in Lake City, and by 1909 moved to Long Valley to homestead. Another native of Lake City, their cousin Harry Wimer, also farmed in the valley.

At that time Reno's Nevada State Journal talked of the possibility of railroads and irrigation projects for northern Washoe County. Schools opened in Long Valley in 1910, among them the Green Springs School where Roy Wimer was the school district clerk. Schools were the principal social centers in rural Nevada and a Long Valley correspondent sent the State Journal area news. At the same time, Bald Mountain Township was created which encompassed Vya, with a justice of the peace and constable to provide law and order.

The post office, named Vya after Roy and Artie Wimer's only child, opened on September 29, 1910. Contrary to a report in the November 27, 1910 edition of the Nevada State Journal, five-year-old Vya was not "the first white child born in that vicinity." This was a typical pioneer anecdote heard so many times in so many places but the story was not true. In fact, Vya was born in Lake City on December 22, 1904.

The settlement of Vya and the surrounding area grew and prospered in the early 1910s. The Wimers and other farmers produced a bountiful potato crop in 1913. Grain and other vegetables also did well that year and farmers continued the tradition of stock raising. In addition, many of the farmers trapped animals for their fur and sold the pelts.

The year 1914 saw a new Green Springs School erected and four school districts operating in Long Valley. Polk's Nevada State Gazetteer for 1914-15 listed Vya's population as 12, but there were hundreds of people living in the Bald Mountain Precinct and relying on Vya's post office.

Tragedy struck the Wimer family in 1917. Artie died of heart disease on June 29th at Beulah in Mosquito Valley, north of the family homestead, according to her death certificate. She was buried in Lake City where she had married Roy in 1902. Twelve-year-old Vya was left without a mother. Life must have been difficult for Roy because by late 1916 his property was listed on the Washoe County Delinquent Tax List. In the meantime, he and daughter Vya moved back to Lake City.

Roy Alton Wimer married again. He died in Sacramento on January 19, 1959. Vya worked as a nurse, married, and lived to be 86 years old. She died on June 15, 1991 in Red Bluff, Tehama County, California. There are no direct descendants.

Both Roy and Vya lived to see the Vya school and post office close in 1941. Harry Wimer was still listed in the 1941 Washoe County Directory as one of the 30 people living in Vya. Despite its meager population, Vya's own Don Crawford represented northern Washoe County in the Nevada State Assembly from 1942 until 1962. Following Crawford's departure from the legislature, Washoe County Commissioners eliminated Bald Mountain Township and the offices of Justice of the Peace and Constable.

For a time in 1993 Vya received national attention. On January 6, a Washoe County Road Department supervisor found a dazed James Stolpa wandering near the maintenance station in Vya. Stolpa, his wife and infant son had become stranded in snowdrifts while driving on a back road from California to Idaho. After walking more than fifty miles in search of help, Stolpa lead his rescuers to a cave where his family had survived the bitter cold. Following the harrowing ordeal, the Stolpas and their rescuers were interviewed on the Phil Donahue TV show.

While some buildings remain today, the community of Vya is gone. Still, you can find Vya Wimer's first name on the current Official Highway Map of Nevada.

Vya - gone but not forgotten.

Photograph courtesy of Manfred Wenner. See: http://www.ghosttowns.com/kurtwenner.html

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