Journal of the American Uncanny: An Oral History of Strange Happenings in Bodie, California

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SUMMARY
In the last twenty-five years (1890-1915), the population of Bodie, California has decreased by 75%. This oral history, which consists of consolidated interview transcripts combined with author commentary, scientific research, and official documents, is meant to provide an alternative perspective to the regional and international reports of the massive population decline in the area. Further, I explore unusual phenomena alleged by many of my interview subjects and ultimately accuse James Stuart Cain of being culpable for this diminishing populace. After conducting the research discussed in this document, it is my conclusion that a great conspiracy extending to [redacted] by way of Mr. Cain and the Ku Klux Klan exists and may pose a threat to the American way of life.

Key words: Bodie, California – oral history – population decline – unnatural phenomena

1 INTRODUCTION
My first knowledge of Bodie came upon learning of its dramatic population decline in the last two decades. Growing up in the Northeast shrouded my understanding of the Western coast of the United States, and my opportunity to study in Nevada has provided me a vehicle by which I was able to study this alien region of my homeland. Upon my arrival in Bodie, I was amazed and terrified by the living conditions of the townsfolk, who seem to tolerate anything; their well waters emerge with the color and consistency of sewage, they are oft-maimed by their collapsing shanty houses, and their children and livestock are disappearing at alarming rates. Perturbed by my initial findings, I began a review of local experiences to ascertain a native perspective on life in Bodie. To adequately prepare readers for my findings, the establishment of contextual information and the methodological approach to my interviews is necessary.

1.1 Bodie’s Population
By the United States Federal Census, Bodie’s population has decreased from nearly 1,600 in 1890 to just over 400 in 1914. This decline has been attributed to mill closures by the government despite tremendous natural resource availability.

1.3 Personal Expertise
I am a professional geochemist, certified by the American Association of Geochemists and Earth Scientists. I completed my
training at Harvard University in 1906 before working for several years with large-scale mining efforts as an analytical geochemist, where my main duty was testing ore samples to determine their purity. During my time in the industry, I cultivated my writing skills by keeping extensive journals of my conversations with miners. I returned to academic research upon securing a position at the University of Western Nevada in 1912 and received the stipend for the Bodie survey in 1914.

1.4 James Stuart Cain and Government Involvement

James Stuart Cain is an entrepreneur and industry leader in Bodie. He owns and operates a vast majority of the Bodie Mining District, which is the largest employer in Bodie. His employees and their families live in company-provided housing that was developed by Cain’s own construction group. Little is known about Mr. Cain’s origins, although his first appearance in Bodie in 1879 coincided with the peak population in the city’s history; since his arrival, Mr. Cain has enjoyed constant profits despite the apparent depletion of the town’s resources and populace. As an industry leader, Mr. Cain is widely suspected by Bodie residents of being in collusion with local and federal government authorities through legal and extralegal channels. A significant interest shared by Mr. Cain and notable public figures such as [redacted] is membership in the Ku Klux Klan. Mr. Cain could not be reached for an interview.

1.5 Interview Subjects and Special Considerations

While the interview transcripts presented here have been condensed and interview subjects have been combined, basic identities have been constructed by the author to serve dual purposes: The industries in which these fictional identities work provide context to their knowledge and understanding while providing anonymity to the interview subjects themselves. It is worth noting that many of the interview subjects were experiencing rapid deterioration in their physical health; the quality of their mental health during these interviews is not certain, although I assert that the subjects were lucid and cognizant of their surroundings, my questions, and their memories.

2 GEOLOGICAL FINDINGS

Shortly after arriving in Bodie, I was lucky to interview Joseph, a local teacher and amateur scientist who had noticed major geological irregularities. I asked him to explain what prompted his investigation:

“It’s been about thirty months since the drinking water went sour. My wife took the kids back to Reno to live with her sisters and mother until everything’s sorted out here. My youngest – he’s the only one of my kids who has been drinking Bodie water since he was born – his teeth are completely gone. Came out one by one, over a period of maybe a month, like little rocks. They were coated in this grey gunk. It made his teeth feel like pumice. We only see it happen with baby teeth. Ain’t been any trouble with nobody’s adult teeth. But don’t get me wrong, I wanted to go with my family. I couldn’t leave with them – I have debts out here that I intend to pay. Only problem is, I’m a teacher and the pay is absolute shit. The work itself is duck soup, but it’ll take me years to get out from under my loans. I figure if I can fix the problem, the water, my wife and kids will come back. I have plenty of time on my hands, just have to figure out what the problem is.”

2.1 Acid Survey Results

I explained my background to Joseph, who agreed to assist me with my studies in exchange for a small portion of my research stipend. Our first set of experiments involved geochemically testing samples from a series of abandoned mining sites. In these experiments, reverse aqua regia (three parts spirit of nitre to one part muriatic acid) was prepared and used to dissolve mineral specimens. This dissolved slurry was treated with sodium molybdate to achieve a colorimetric reaction, and colorimetric evaluation was performed using United States Geological Survey (USGS) standards.

Joseph and I found that all but one of the closed sites (thirty-four sites) contained significant amounts of easily accessible gold ore in topsoil and exposed bedrock. These findings are in direct conflict with published reports from the USGS, whose standards I used. I asked Joseph what he thought about our results.

“They don’t surprise me one bit. Everybody in this town knows some weird shit is happening, what with the plants and the fucking glowing. I’m hoping that the water is just a rogue
waste stream from one of the mines and I’ll be able to find it, but every day I get more scared.”

I asked Joseph what he was scared of. “That it’s all related, and we’re doomed,” he replied. When I pressed Joseph as to why ‘we’ might be doomed, he would only say that “We’ve all been wondering about it. Whether it was true, that those spots had all been mined out already, and if those miners just up and left so fast, Greener pastures, they said. Certainly seemed weird that the led was in such fast to confirm that the land was shot. Like I said, we all knew something strange was going on.”

I implored Joseph to show me the flora and glowing phenomenon he described. For two weeks, he ignored my efforts until I offered him an additional portion of my stipend, at which point he immediately agreed.

### 2.2 Presence of Bioluminescent Extremophiles

Joseph brought me to a large tract of land held by Mr. Cain’s company after surprising me at my office one evening. He refused to tell me our destination until we arrived at a long stretch of fence that seemed to divide the entire landscape into the space behind us and our foreground. Before we descended into the property, Joseph gave some explanation.

“This is where they come. Some nights, Cain and his closest associates come out here and perform ceremonies. They’re not right. People hear screams and strange noises. They’re not just out here yelling and drinking, if you catch my drift. Plus, everybody who comes out here after says they seen shit that defies logic.”

I am a hardened skeptic and a meticulous scientist. Hoaxes are of no interest to me and I have a discerning eye for falsified evidence. Having established this, I can write that my findings run contrary to all known geological science and that I have no reasonable explanation for these occurrences.

At a basin in the property Joseph showed me, a small gathering space had been assembled. Twelve podiums carved from the earth beneath them were arranged in a circle with an approximate six-foot radius, and luminescent plant life extruded out from the base of each dais. Close examination of these plants was inconclusive, but minute and extremely active geothermal vents were discovered surrounding the base of each podium. This discovery has two logical outcomes: The presence of this local flora suggests heretofore undiscovered species of bioluminescent extremophiles, as well as the revelation that, as implied by the geothermal vents encircling them, the podium structures naturally formed as a result of some internal pressure. Modern science offers few explanations for this phenomenon, although Dr. Marie Curie’s recent work with radioactive materials (which I do not pretend to understand) may provide a reasonable understanding of these plant growths in years to come.

When I proposed the explanation of radioactivity to Joseph, he scoffed at my inquiries of plausibility. "No way. The glowing happens brightest when they’re out here, plus the ground shakes and there’s noise like thunder. Show me an element that can do all that and then we can talk about radioactivity. Tell you what: Tomorrow, we’ll meet and I’ll give you something I’ve been working on. It might help you understand. I have to tell you, though – it might be dangerous.”

### 2.3 Earthquakes

After our evening in the basin at the Cain property, Joseph informed me that, for his own safety, he could no longer assist me with my research. He fulfilled his promise, leaving me with an extensive journal containing his record of the dates and times of Cain’s meetings and the relative magnitudes of the light emissions and seismic effects. After careful study of Joseph’s journal, it is clear to me that there is a strong correlation between Cain’s visits to the abandoned property and these unusual phenomena. In fact, if Joseph’s journals are reliable, the magnitude and frequency of these events has been accelerating for several weeks.

Several nights after my last interaction with Joseph, I was woken by a sudden and violent shaking that shifted heavy pieces of furniture about my room. Before the shaking ended, I was able to glimpse an immense shimmering light over the Cain property, surpassing every imagination of an aurora I was able to conjure from my readings in color, size, and movement.

Unable to sleep, I returned to the property after many hours and discovered a vast chasm at the center of the ring of podiums, belching small flames and sulfurous fumes. The same mystical light as the one I had seen earlier emanated tauntingly from the crevice, and although an otherworldly sensation urged me to crawl into the chasm, the heat and smoke prevented me from doing so. Four weeks have passed since this strange night, and I have taken to paying my lodger to lock my room from the exterior as a preventative for my midnight excursions.

Having satisfied my original objective to verify or refute the USGS reports of ore depletion, I sought to further explore the bizarre circumstances afflicting Bodie. As a logical advance, I next interviewed local ranchers and farmhands who were not members of Cain-owned businesses.

### 3 BIOLOGICAL FINDINGS

I performed a series of interviews with Billy, a rancher, and Chuck, a farm owner. Both men were stout with tired eyes and sun-dried skin. Billy had worked on the construction of a railroad until he blew a hole in his foot with a tamping iron and Chuck had been kind enough to offer Billy a job (despite Billy’s restricted mobility). Chuck inherited the farm from his parents and had lived in Bodie for forty years before Cain’s arrival.

I asked Chuck what life was like during Bodie’s peak years. "Business was alright. There were a lot of young people, people who you thought should still be back at home with a mom taking care of them. They came out here to get rich by the dozen. You should’ve seen their eyes as they slowly realized that they weren’t here to get rich, but to get f**ked by the industry as it got rich off of them. Took the light right out of ’em. Once upon a time, all those kids were imagining this place as the land of milk and honey. Then they arrived and saw the snot and the dust and discovered that the cost of freedom was Hell.”

Chuck described Cain’s arrival: "I remember the day he arrived. I think he meant well at first, but something in the mines got to him. He’s demon spawn now, if you ask me. Something wrong with his eyes. After he changed, people round here wouldn’t talk about it. They were too scared and whatever is in him got bolder and bolder. Now he’s doing something to his workers. Those folk ain’t moving off to Montana or Arizona or Utah. They’re moving straight into the ground. Everybody
sees the lights, hears the screams. We feel the shaking. He’s doing something fuckin’ biblical out there now. I just hope I die of old age before anything really nasty happens to me.”

When I asked Chuck to expound on what he meant by ‘really nasty,’ he simply said “Go ask Billy about the livestock.”

3.1 Crow Lethality

I found Billy on the roof of a barn. From a distance, it appeared that he was sweeping heavy black ash from the rafters, but as I approached it became clear that the ash was made up of dead birds. I asked him to explain the situation.

“This has been happening for weeks. The lights at night draw the crows in, they roost for a few days, and then they’re dead. Can’t leave ‘em up here for more than a couple of hours because they rot faster than normal. They land up here so they can shit on the roof one more time before they die, I guess. Hadn’t ever seen anything like it before. Here – come look.”

He reached down and threw me the carcass of one of the crows. Its feathers were slimy and fraying, and it oozed a putrid gel onto my hands as I caught it. After consulting ornithological resources, I was able to identify key symptoms of the crows exposed to the strange light. These birds were lethargic and unable to maintain regular postures. Based on the transmission patterns of these symptoms between birds, I believe the causal disease to be viral in nature.

I told Billy about my conversation with Chuck and asked him about the livestock. Billy paled and stuttered: “I’m not sure you really want to see any of that.” I insisted that I did.

3.2 Livestock Mutilation

Billy climbed down from the roof and asked me a second time. “You sure?” Again, I responded in the affirmative.

He walked to the front of the barn and slid open the enormous door. The inside of the building was dusky and smelled worse than the crows. Chuck had called the scene ‘really nasty;’ it was an understatement. Carcasses littered the floor of the barn, partitioned by species into heaps.

“Came out at dawn to find them all like this,” Billy explained. “The cattle’s bones are gone, but there ain’t no holes where something could’ve pulled them out. I suppose they must’ve come out the mouths. The bones, I mean. No idea how it happened, and I only live a mile away. No noise last night, either. Scares the shit out of me.”

I pointed out that the cattle only accounted for one of several piles.

“Oh, sure. The pigs had it bad. Whatever did this to the cattle turned the pigs’ tongues back. Took their eyes, too. They were still alive, bumping into each other this morning. The herding dogs were bald and the skin on their legs and arms was fused up with their torsos, so they could only waddle. They were so pitiful we put them down along with the swine. The goat is the only animal on the entire farm that’s fine, and it isn’t even so fine after all.”

I asked Billy to explain what he meant about the goat.

“The goat? His eyes are all funny now. Like, turned sideways. You know how a goat’s eyes are supposed to look, right?
They’re not like that anymore. His horns look bigger, too. But he seems fine. Can’t really ask him, with him being a goat and all." I left the farm as quickly as I could and did not leave my room for some time after witnessing the horrors of that barn.

4 EXTRAPHYSICAL FINDINGS

My final interviews delved into the superstitious. As a proud scientist, I was surprised to pursue this approach, but the bizarre geochemical and biological phenomena surrounding Bodie proved inexplicable in any other context. I first spoke with Helen, a local restauranteur, at her business (the Bodie Inn’s diner). She was aware of the auroras and earthquakes in the Cay property, and immediately offered an explanation:

"It’s the native horses! They’re trampling around, exploring their old grounds. That Cain man disturbed their resting place with his mines and now they’re haunting the town. Everyone’s leaving now, all scared off. Not me, though. I’m part Cherokee – my grandmother – so they’ll leave me alone."

I asked her to elaborate on how the ghosts of the Indians who once inhabited the region could produce the auroras and strange plant life I observed. She seemed eager to offer up another theory, stating "It’s their drums! They can play their drums to pray to different gods. They have a god that makes those odd plants you saw and another god that creates wondrous light shows. It’s simple."

Sensing a lack of insight, I asked Helen to explain the occurrences at Chuck’s farm. A patron at the bar – a haggard grey man – spoke up instead. "If you want to know what the fuck is going on around here, you and I can talk after you buy me a drink."

"I thanked Helen for her time and purchased a beer for the man, who introduced himself as John Pryor. He spoke in a heartfelt tone that made him seem like he was on the verge of tears. "I used to be the vice-president of the Miners’ Union here, before Cain forced me out. He tried to cut me in, you know, before all this shit started happening."

"It started out simple enough. This guy, Jim Cain, comes in from the East with money to build some mines and mills. He starts up his little empire, employs a couple local folk, and makes a decent living for a while. But Jim gets bored. He reaches out to some old friends back East, friends who have been in politics for years at this point, and he says he has the property needed for an experiment they used to talk about."

"Jim used to be into some pretty weird shit, you know. Abduction shit, occult shit, murder shit. He and his Ivy-League buddies would go out and find some toddler or an old lady and, well, they’d make them disappear."

"So his old buddies start talking to Jim, talking to each other. They all agree that it might be time to try some of their old experiments again, but bigger this time. Maybe the reason the experiments didn’t work the first time was because they weren’t impressive enough to attract attention."

"I ask John who he refers to when he says ‘attention.’"

"Shut the fuck up," he retorts. "Let me tell my story. It’s all I know and any questions from you aren’t going to make me remember something new. Anyways, they decide to give it another shot."

"They get together about three years ago. That’s when the first group of miners went missing, and when the water went to shit. Cain and his friends all drink water from a secret spring up in the hills since they fucked up their ritual and poisoned the well water here. The thing was, they didn’t actually kill all those miners. One made it back to me, told me everything before he died. He looked like they had tried to take all the skin on his hands and feet. I still remember the feeling of him grabbing at me – all that muscle and bone rubbing my palms."

"I confronted Cain and told him I knew everything. He took it surprisingly well, offered me some money for my silence. I wanted more. I told him I wanted in, whatever he was doing, since it must’ve been huge, especially with his political buddies there. He agreed, said getting me involved was the best way to keep me from talking, anyways."

"The shit they made me do – you wouldn’t believe it. I won’t talk about it. And I did it for the last couple years. But know this: His’s right. There’s something else out there. Recently, we were getting closer and closer, so Jim decided to go all out. And we got its attention, weeks ago, when that all that strangeness happened at Chuck’s farm."

"Jim said it was my fault, that it got away. I don’t know how anyone else there was keeping it together, with all the fire and sh!t flying everywhere. Honestly, I don’t think that it was my fault, but Jim needed a fall guy. With fucking __________ there, too, Jim couldn’t get embarrassed like that and have it be his own fault. He had to be in charge, so they blamed me. I’m sure I’ll be dead soon enough. Besides, I deserve it."

"So here we are. I’m hiding out around town, waiting for Jim or his friends to find me. They know I’ll talk, and folks know that you’re asking around. You should get out of here while you still can."

I was shocked by John’s statement. First, I clarified that by using the name __________, he meant the __________. He affirmed his accusation that __________ is involved with Jim Cain in a pagan cult that has engaged in extreme acts of cruelty and violence. He further asserted that __________ met Jim Cain through the Ku Klux Klan.

Second, I strongly considered John’s accusations. While his claims were obviously controversial, I reflected on my findings and interviews.

5 CONCLUSIONS

After a thorough review of my collected evidence and transcripts of the interviews I performed, I have arrived at my concluding statements. Before continuing, it is worth mentioning a few key points:

- Joseph is an amalgamation of several research assistants I secured during my studies. These research assistants have all since disappeared. Along with the journal documenting aurora and seismic events (which contains over one hundred entries), I have recorded forty-eight independent events in the two months I have stayed in Bodie.

- Chuck’s farm is representative of more than a dozen farms in the Bodie area. All of these farms experienced complete massacres of their livestock in the manners described by Billy.

- John Pryor is not an amalgamation nor a fictional name; per his wishes, his real name and the original transcript of our conversation are included in section 4. John disappeared shortly after our conversation at the Bodie Inn. As a result, I
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have compiled this manuscript with great haste and intend to mail it immediately. I will attempt to leave Bodie after mailing this document, but expect to encounter some obstacles upon my departure.

- The population of Bodie has continued to drop in the two months of my residency. There are now approximately 180 surviving citizens of Bodie. The water appears to have incapacitated the townsfolk.
- I was able to clandestinely obtain the transcript of a telegram sent by James Stuart Cain to [redacted], although the secrecy of its acquisition is now in question. This has only served as further motivation to complete this document and return to the safety of Nevada as soon as possible.

With these considerations in place, I firmly accuse James Stuart Cain and his associates, including [redacted], to be occultists and murderers. Their actions have degraded a once-flourishing city into a haven of demonic hedonism and senseless violence. Since the [redacted] of the [redacted] have been corrupted, I call upon the good Christian people of this nation to return justice and God to this region by any means necessary. I have witnessed the horrors of this place and pray that, at minimum, my manuscript escapes this forsaken Hell. As a final damning piece of evidence, I include the transcript of the intercepted telegram sent by James Cain to [redacted]:

DEAR [redacted] STOP
NEW SUCCESSES HERE STOP
WE MADE IT TO THE COAST STOP
OUR NEXT STEPS ARE UNKNOWN STOP
WE PUSH THIS NEW FRONTIER OF MEANING AND UNDERSTANDING STOP
BEST REGARDS STOP
JIM

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