

CHAPTER 4

Bagdad and Points West – Dish Hill, Trojan, Siberia, Klondike

Long abandoned railroad outposts
in sight of old Route 66

*Lat 34° 34.9865' N.
Long 115° 52.5026' W.*

Bagdad was originally named by the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1883. The name is probably a deliberate misspelling of the capital city of Iraq, a place that was believed to be of similar climate. The 'H' in the name was dropped for the convenience of railroad telegraph operators.¹ In the 1920s, Bagdad had the unfortunate distinction of having the second highest temperature ever recorded in California, 124° F, and the longest dry spell ever documented in the United States. For 32 months, from September 1909 to April 1912, no rain fell in Bagdad.²

Today there is nothing left of Bagdad except a single salt cedar tree on the north side of Route 66 and a small cemetery with 17 long-forgotten graves. The site is eight miles west of Amboy on old Route 66, near the lava field at Amboy Crater. A single bare stump of a palm tree about eight feet tall was removed in 2003 and was the last



A solitary salt cedar tree stands in the center of a large clearing on the north shoulder of old Route 66 and is all that remains to mark the site of Bagdad. All of the buildings for the roadside businesses at Bagdad were demolished in 1973. When Interstate 40 was opened, this stretch of highway was bypassed and the businesses that depended on tourist traffic quickly died. View is to the northeast; the Bristol Mountains are in the far distance on the left.

Joe de Kehoe, photo.



Photo taken in 1916 of a corrugated tin shed that once housed the watering facilities for the railroad at Bagdad.

Photo courtesy of Martha Burnau.

of a row of stately palms that once lined the north side of the tracks near the depot, the Harvey House, and the railroad watering facilities. Bagdad has always held a special appeal for Route 66 aficionados because it is so remote and it has vanished so completely.

Bagdad rose to prominence and became a flourishing community in the late 1800s because of its location at the intersection of the railroad and the highway to Twentynine Palms. If you look at the lone tree standing there today, it is hard to imagine that, in 1910, Bagdad was the largest town between Barstow and Needles—even today that is not saying much. A dirt



service road that parallels the railroad tracks north of Bagdad predates the construction of Route 66. More importantly, Bagdad was the major railroad shipping point for transporting gold ore from two large mines—the Orange Blossom Mine in the Bristol Mountains, about nine miles north of Bagdad, and the War Eagle Mine³ on the east slope of Lead Mountain, ten and a half miles south of Bagdad in the Bullion Mountains.⁴⁵ In the 1870s, the War Eagle mine also produced silver, lead, molybdenum, and vanadium ore.

Prior to 1910, a dirt road ran directly south from Bagdad across the broad sand stretches of Bristol Dry Lake. It skirted the lava field of Amboy Crater and climbed up the slope up to the Bullion Mountains where the road forked. The branch to the southeast went to the Dale mining district in the Pinto Mountains and the other branch went southwest to the oasis of Twentynine Palms. The faint scars of the road across Bristol Dry Lake can still be seen today, but the road is no longer open to travel.

In the 1890s, there was a steady flow of wagon traffic between Bagdad and the mines in the Dale district; Bagdad businesses continued to expand, as did the railroad facilities. The community eventually included a railroad depot, a two-story Harvey House restaurant and hotel, a school, a water pumping station, and a number of warehouses for railroad equipment. Unlike other Harvey House restaurants, which featured



Bagdad was not only a place for loading passengers and freight, it was also an important watering stop for the steam engines before they headed up the long grade toward Ludlow. This 1916 photo shows a water tank on the siding with spouts at either end that could service two engines at once.

Photo courtesy of Martha Burnau.



Photo taken in 1916 of the twin pumps at Bagdad used to pump water into two large storage tanks and then gravity-fed to the steam engines.

Photo courtesy of Martha Burnau.



An undated photo of the Harvey House at Bagdad.

Photo courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.



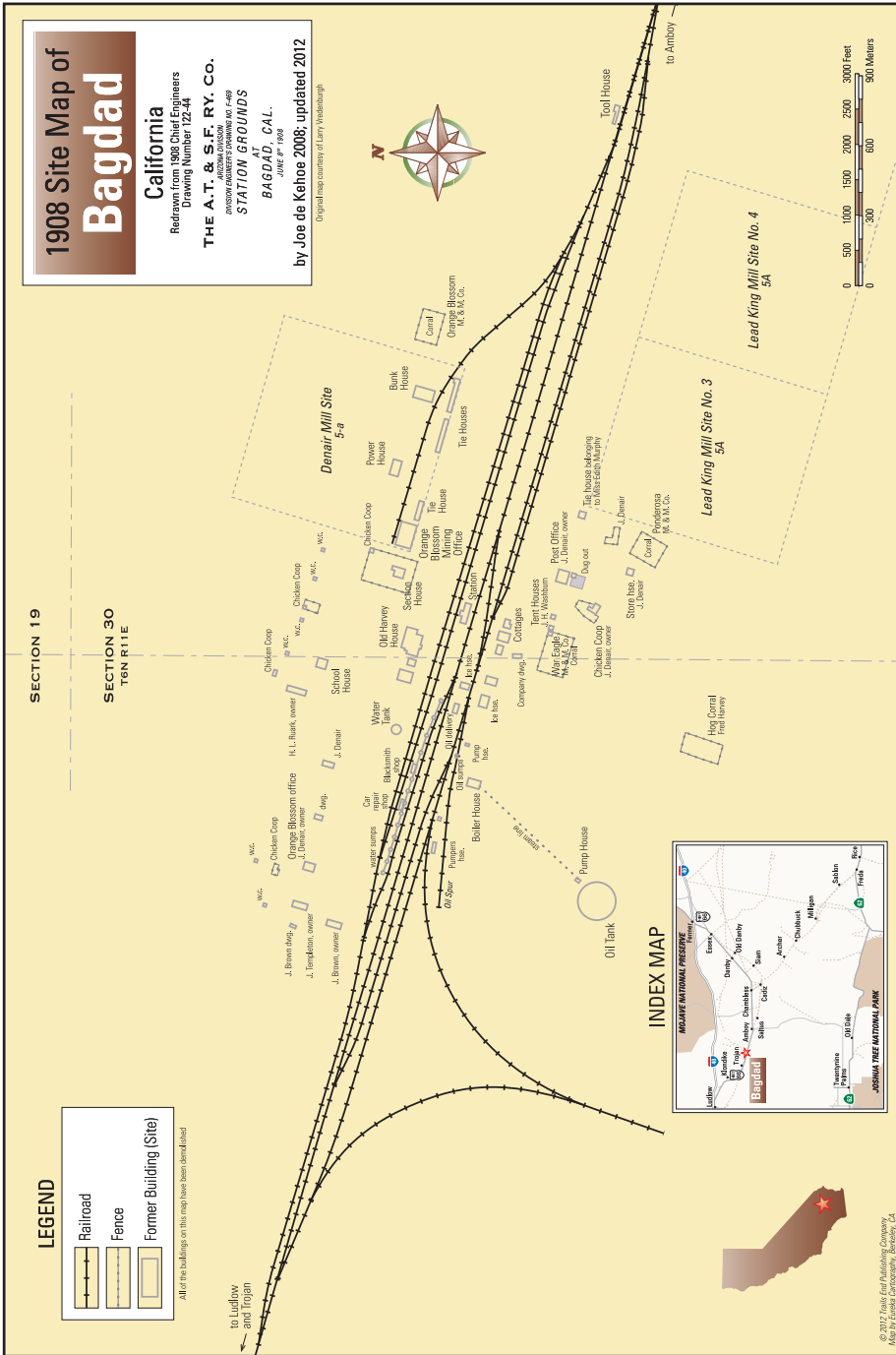
A 1923 photo of the Santa Fe railroad facilities at Bagdad.

Photo courtesy of Martha Burnau.

Harvey Girls in starched white aprons as waitresses, the Bagdad restaurant was just a little too remote for such fineries so it was staffed by men. From 1889 to 1923, there was a post office in the Bagdad depot. When the post office closed, mail was routed to Amboy.

At the turn of the century, the total permanent population of Bagdad was about 35, almost all of whom were affiliated with the railroad. Freight trains ran slowly in the early 1900s, which meant that by the time a train reached Bagdad

from Needles or Daggett it was time to change crews. The extra crews—conductors, firemen and engineers—were housed at Bagdad. Freight trains needed a helper engine to assist them up the long westbound track from Bagdad to Ash Hill, so there was also a roundhouse and section houses for workers.



1908 map of the railroad facilities at Bagdad redrawn from Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad Co. chief engineer's drawings. It is interesting to note that the Bagdad cemetery is not shown.

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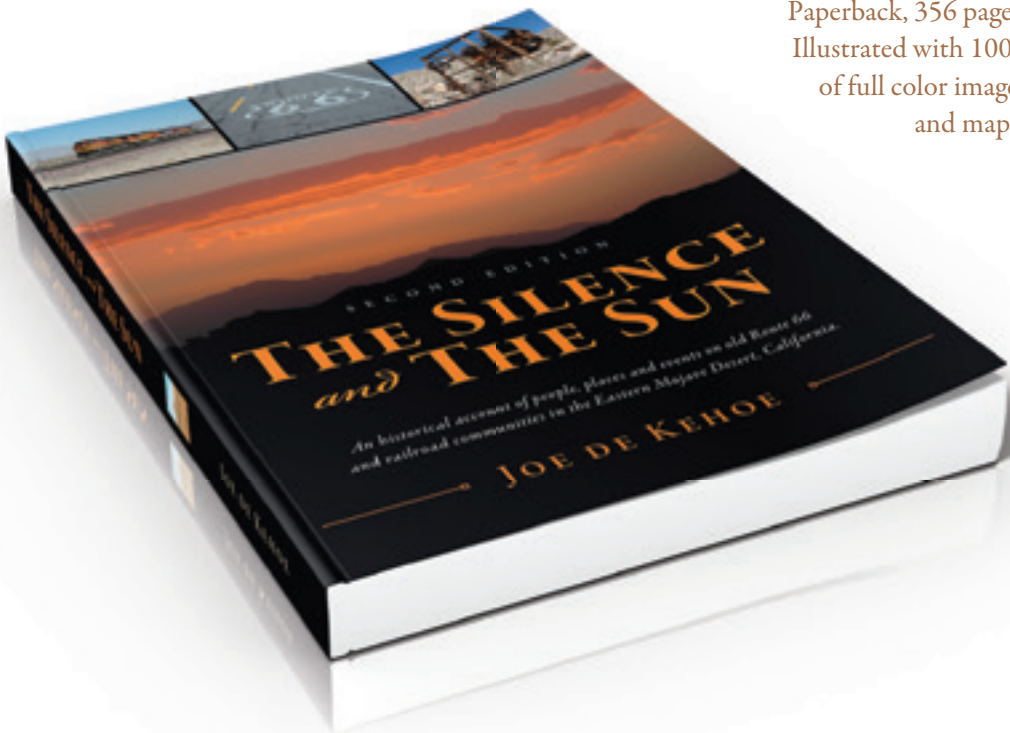
ISBN: 978-0-9793827-1-0

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