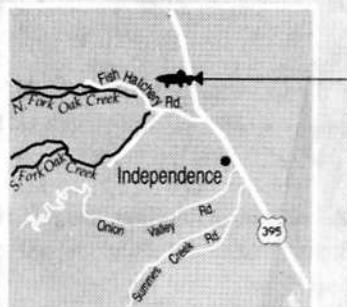


■ Visitors Welcome ■

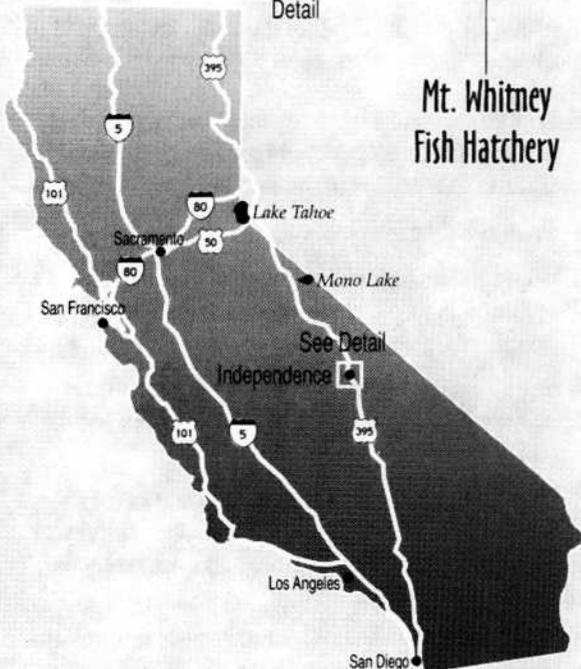


Friends of Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery
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 Independence, CA 93526
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Detail

Mt. Whitney
 Fish Hatchery



■ Photo Credits: Eastern California Museum ■

MT. WHITNEY FISH HATCHERY

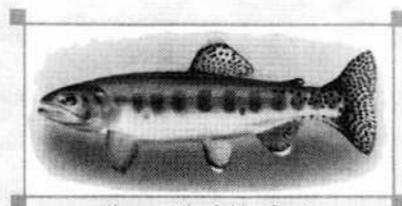
Independence, California

A History of a California State Fish Hatchery



*"To design a building that would match the mountains,
 would last forever, and be a showplace for all time."*

M. J. Connell, Fish and Game Commissioner, 1915



Home of the Golden Trout



Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery towers above the Owens Valley today as a monument to the foresight and dedication of the citizens of Independence and the California Department of Fish and Game.

■ Finding the Perfect Location ■

When the proposal to construct a new fish hatchery was first discussed in the early 1900s, it created tremendous competition between several locations.

Among sites that were believed to be considered were Tuttle Creek west of Lone Pine, Bishop Creek west of Bishop, Oak Creek west of Independence, and a possible site in San Bernardino County. W. H. Shebley, a Fish Culturist of thirty-two years at the time, had stated that, "the site chosen is as near ideal as can be conceived; abundant water supply and no legal complications over it; central location and excellent transportation facilities." The following factors led to the selection of Oak Creek. First, the forty acre parcel of land would be a gift to the state from the local citizens. Second, the guaranteed use of water from Oak Creek. Third, the temperature of the water was better suited to fish production. All of these factors made Oak Creek the best location.



■ Community Support ■

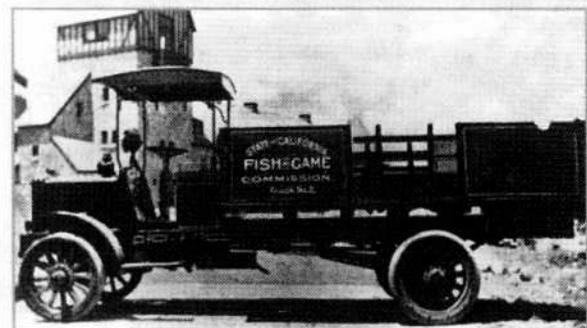
The Inyo Independent, December 15, 1915, reported that: On Thursday afternoon December 15, 1915, the citizens of Independence and vicinity held a little meeting in the courthouse of which everyone may justly be proud. It was called to raise \$1500.00 to purchase a state fish hatchery site on Oak Creek, and

while not quite the entire amount was raised at the meeting, enough was raised so that the balance was immediately guaranteed, and with a very little work done later the amount subscribed went over the \$1500.00 mark.

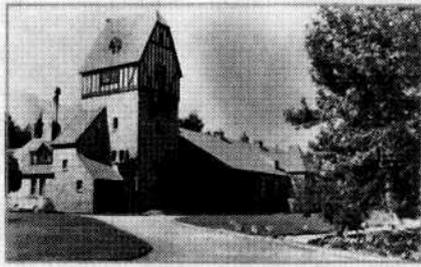


There was no oratory, just business. Judge

Dehy called the meeting to order and explained the purpose of it. George W. Naylor read the paper which had been prepared for signatures of those desiring to assist in the matter, A. W. Eibeshutz spoke about a dozen words, and the ball started rolling. No one got stage fright, but they just walked up and signed their names. The \$125-pieces took the lead, followed by the hundreds, the fifties, the twenty fives, and so on down the line. There was no talk, no coaxing; every-one seemed to know just what they wanted to do—and they did it. It was certainly a liberal subscription.



M. J. Connell of the State Fish and Game Commission, who left the Thursday prior after spending several days in the valley, stated that a site must be furnished wherever a hatchery was established. This both Lone Pine and Independence have agreed to do, and regardless of where the Commission finally decides to build the hatchery, it will be a wonderful benefit to the entire county.



The citizens of Independence and vicinity demonstrated support by donating 40 acres of land for the hatchery site, to the State of California that still exists today.

This gift of land, a pledge by the Inyo County Board of Supervisors of \$500 to construct a road from US 395 to the hatchery, and the commitment by the California Fish and Game Commission of \$20,000 to construct the facility, created a one-of-a-kind California state treasure that must be preserved.

■ Building The Hatchery ■

Once the site was selected, the process of designing the building started. The building was designed by a team of six men led by Charles Dean of the State Department of Engineering. The team was instructed by Fish and Game Commissioner M. J. Connell, "To design a building that would match the mountains, would last forever, and would be a showplace for all time." Commissioner Connell expressed great foresight by stating these guidelines which created a one-of-a-kind showplace for the state.

The hatchery building is constructed of native granite collected within a quarter of a mile of the site. The walls are two to three feet thick. None of the stones used in construction were cut, but were "sorted to fit." The roof is red Spanish tile made in Lincoln, California from red clay found at that location. The interior is finished with Oregon ash. The

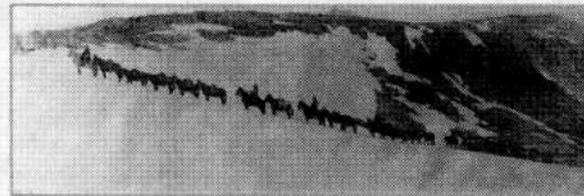


grounds of the hatchery were landscaped by a gardener brought in from Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Approximately 3,500 tons of boulders used in the walls were guaranteed not to "crumble until the mountains shall fall."

Construction was started in late March of 1916 with the goal of completing the project in time to receive eggs in the spring of 1917. Mr. H. V. Grant, superintendent of construction for the State Department of Engineering, was in charge of construction. The decision to use local help and on-site stone reduced the cost of construction. Initial cost was estimated at \$30,000. Final cost was reported to be \$60,000.

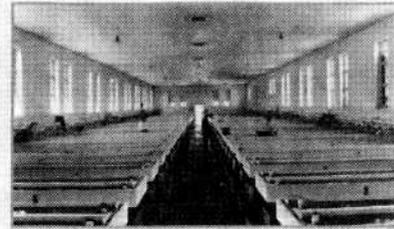
■ Raising Trout ■

The early operation of the hatchery is reflected in comments made by F. A. Shelby, Superintendent of Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery, in 1917. "The Mt Whitney Fish Hatchery is the largest and best equipped fish hatchery in California and is under the jurisdiction of the State Fish and Game Commission. It has a yearly capacity of 2,000,000 fry." The first trout hatched in 1917 were from eggs collected at Rae Lakes. The eggs were transported from the collecting station at Rae



Lakes via Baxter Pass by mule train to the hatchery. After the 1927 spawning season, eggs were no longer collected at Rae Lakes due to declining production.

The spawning season of 1918 saw the first collection of golden trout eggs from the Cottonwood Lakes. This program continues to this day and has provided golden trout for planting throughout the Sierra Nevada. This

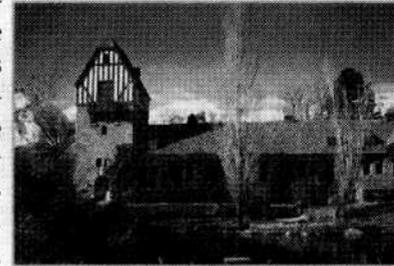


Egg troughs in the hatchery building.

program is handled by the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery and is the sole source of golden trout eggs in California. Since the golden trout is the California state fish, it is obvious that Mt. Whitney Hatchery is vital to its continued success.

■ The Hatchery Today ■

While fish production at the hatchery has been an important part of the Owens Valley economy since 1917, the building and grounds



continue to be a vital component of the spirit of the community. The stately building and beautiful grounds of the hatchery have lasted decades of high school graduations, weddings, concerts, family picnics, and numerous other functions. The beautiful and unique setting for events is important to the people of Owens Valley. In addition, the site is a popular destination for tourists. The hatchery is featured in countless guide books and pictured on post cards. The number of visitors totals over 60,000 each year.

■ Hatchery In Jeopardy ■

The California Department of Fish and Game scheduled the closure of Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery on June 30, 1996, in an effort to cut department expenditures. Opposition to the closure began in the local community and grew to include citizens throughout California. They recognized the need to continue the hatchery as a working facility and

preserve its historic and cultural significance for the people of the State of California.

As a result of a public meeting in March 1996, the State Department of Fish and Game formed a Strategic Planning Committee of interested citizens to advise to Director on the future of the hatchery.

■ Looking to the Future ■

The Friends of Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery, using the plan created by the Strategic Planning Committee, is entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with The Department of Fish and Game.

The MOU will allow the "Friends" to operate an Interpretive Center, Gift Shop and Visitor Tours at the Hatchery.

In addition the "Friends" will assume some of the maintenance on this magnificent building and the beautiful grounds.

The five components for the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery Strategic Plan are:

- 1 Enable the hatchery to realize its full potential in support of the Department's efforts to manage California's trout resources;
- 2 Preserve the historical value of the hatchery;
- 3 Foster a sense of pride, ownership and involvement in the future of the hatchery by the people of California;
- 4 Encourage public/private partnerships for the most effective use of limited Department funds and resources; and
- 5 Provide the public with an interpretation of the historical significance of the hatchery, knowledge of the hatchery's function and an understanding of our natural resources.