

# FORWARD

The first time I photographed the abandoned mining camp of Bodie was in 1968. A photographer friend knew I enjoyed photographing abandoned homes and dilapidated barns. He suggested that the ghost town of Bodie would be interesting to photograph. He was right!



*Nick Gariaeff - photograph by Polly Gariaeff*

I generally photographed Bodie several times a year. I would schedule a day trip when visiting relatives in Carson City. For many years I photographed Bodie without thought to the people who lived there. I made it a point not to read books about Bodie, or learn about the mining operations, buildings, make of cars - anything. It was just a place to wander about and photograph. I always thought my best photographs were created when I didn't consciously think about what I was doing. I still do. I believe the unconscious mind can process the sense of the surrounding environment and react to it artistically much better than if one tried to stage a particular outcome.

As time went on, curiosity got the best of me. I wondered why I was attracted to the place, and what the photographs meant. People would ask me questions about the Bodie, thinking I must be an expert because I spent a considerable amount of time there. I could not answer - I had no idea! Bodie was a puzzle. I started wondering what was real, and what was staged. Who were these people? From where did they come from and where did they go? I started reading the California State Park brochure for the first time, and then all the books about Bodie I could get my hands on. The more I read, the more fascinating the town and its people became.

Eventually, I started doing research on some of the inhabitants using online census records, and going through old newspapers on microfilm. I started exchanging e-mail with relatives of some of the Bodie descendants. Vacation time was spent in the vault of the Recorder's Office and upstairs in the Mono County Museum in Bridgeport, California, to search wonderful old bound volumes for property, marriage, death, and tax records. I became obsessed with Bodie. It became clear it was my destiny to produce a book which included both my photographs, and the information which I had gathered about the people who lived there. It seemed as though I had become a medium in which ghosts of the old mining camp were communicating through me. They tugged at my arm saying "read about me". Another would grab my hand, point, and say "No - find out more about him!" When I researched the people of Bodie, there would often be connections to people that had no relationship to Bodie. These people were also fascinating to research. However, the ghosts of Bodie kept pulling me back to my main focus. This book attempts to connect the images I have created over many years, and the people of Bodie I have learned about.

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