

River Joe Was Unforgettable Dam Workman

LAS VEGAS REVIEW - JOURNAL July 5, 1935 — "River Joe" Whitney, one of the colorful figures of the early days of the Boulder dam construction, is in the hospital today in a serious condition from several knife wounds, and G. L. Murah, another former Boulder dam worker and one-time bosom pal of the injured man, is being held in jail following a knifing affray on South First Street yesterday afternoon.

"River Joe" is suffering from numerous knife wounds on his neck and his back which required more than 100 stitches to close. While his condition is serious, he is expected to recover.

The argument between the two men, according to police reports, started in a South First street tavern and continued for nearly half a block before it finally halted. It started as a fist fight and ended with knife play.

The debate started over a woman with whom the two men were drinking.

Both men were employes of Six Companies at the start of the construction work on Boulder dam. Whitney was one of the first employes in the river camp down in the canyon.

"River Joe" recovered as he was back in the news, when a story appeared in the Review-Journal of December 26, 1935, as follows:

"'River Joe' Whitney, Las Vegas' 'most arrested man' came home for Christmas."

"River Joe, who has been in and out of the city jail so often that police officers have lost track of his visits, not only spent Christmas 'at home' but will be there for New Year's, Washington's and Lincoln's birthday, Valentine's Day, and other less important dates.

"For 'River Joe' got 90 days from 'Uncle Tom' Carroll, as he calls him, because 'River Joe' was drunk and disorderly.

"'River Joe' is a famous character around the workings at Boulder dam. He was one of the first men into the canyon when work was started and picked up his nickname from that. He has been known to all his friends and to the police as 'River Joe' since 1929.

"'I thought I was gonna beat this rap,' Joe said this morning, as he pushed a broom around the office at the police station.

"'Uncle Tom told me what a great guy I was. How I'd been one of the first men on the job. How I'd risked my life in building Boulder dam and everything. He made me feel real important.

"'Then Uncle Tom said he was gonna reform me and busted me in the nose with a 90 day sentence. Just for getting drunk.

"'Reform me. Hell, this'll just get me behind in my drinking so I'll have to catch up quick.'

"And with that 'River Joe,' with one mighty sweep of his broom, boosted all the floor refuse out the door and continued his work on the outside."