

"There was much that was ugly and some that was bad, but there was a vigorous manifestation of creative power."

Henry Bates in the October 1889 *Atlantic Monthly*

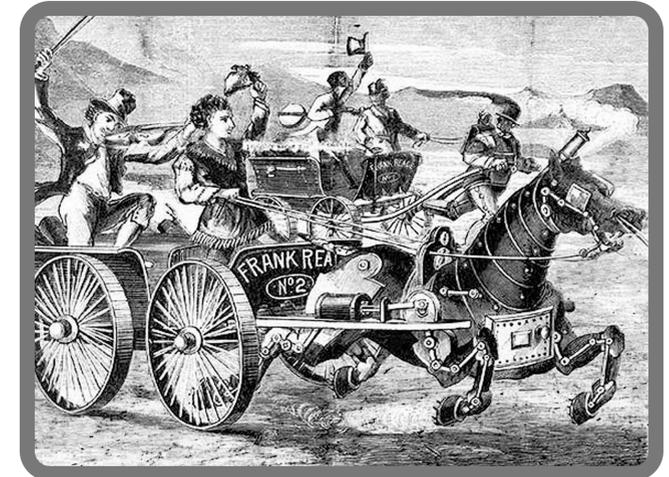
"Lying Jim" Townsend was a prominent publisher in the Great Basin in the 1870s and 80s, well known for his tendency to exaggerate in the service of his pocketbook. His original 1870 travel poster, inspired by a Paiute gathering about which he had heard the vaguest of rumors, was intended to spur European investment in the supposedly bustling metropolis of Olinghouse, then a tiny mining town on the route between Wadsworth and the Black Rock Desert. The poster accidentally leaked in New York and Washington, D.C. and soon a growing number of immigrants began making annual pilgrimages to the playa. Jim did not discover that Europeans were attending the festival until 1881, after which he became a regular attendee and much-loved figurehead.



"Lying Jim" Townsend's much improved 1889 travel brochure

"The figure was about twelve feet high from the bottom of the huge feet to the top of the plug hat which adorned the steam man's head. An enormous belly was required to accommodate the boiler and steam chest, and this corpulency agreed well with the height of the metallic steam chap. To give full working room to the very delicate machinery in his interior, the giant was made to convey a sort of knapsack upon his shoulders. The machine held its arms in the position taken by a man when he is drawing a carriage."

Journalist Harry Enton regarding the Steam Man Mark II



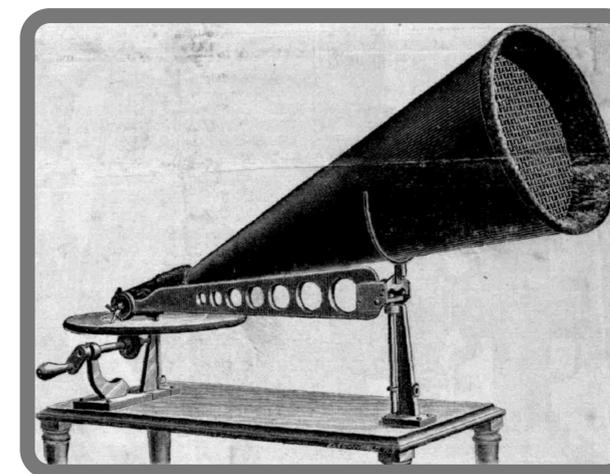
Frank Reade's Steam Man Mark II, racing his Steam Horse in 1882. The horse won.



Central Pacific Railroad ticket. It was more common to travel by rail to Wadsworth, resupply, then hire horses and wagons for the remainder of the journey.

"Shortly after we set up camp, our neighbors surprised me by asking us to cover the brands on our horses. Apparently the first year Arbuckle & Co. attended, Lying Jim [Townsend] told them the Paiutes were horse thieves and would feel more comfortable if they arrived without visible brands. The Arbucklers believed him, and it has since become a tradition!"

Journals of George Smith, September 1883



Harold Johnson's Berliner gramophone, 1889

Music on the playa changed forever in 1888, when Harold Johnson brought an early phonograph to the Great Basin. Some musically inclined participants accused listeners of being spectators, and controversy raged when event organizers banned sound recording devices in 1889. The ban was lifted in 1901, but registration was required for each recording device between 1901 and the mid 1950s.

Put on the headphones to hear the first pre-recorded music heard on the playa, remastered from Harold Johnson's original 1888 phonograph cylinders.