

LAS CALAVERAS

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A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

San Andreas, California

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EDITORIAL

Everyone is reminded that dues are now payable as we voted at the July meeting at the Calaveras Big Trees to collect our dues on a fiscal year from July 1 to June 30.

Many people seem to have the idea that a person must be sponsored in order to join the Calaveras Historical Society. Therefore, if you know someone who would enjoy our programs, invite him to become a member. He may be waiting for an invitation. Sadie Hunt has membership application blanks which she is anxious to pass out. Send these to anyone interested in the Society.

At the Columbia Conference of Local Historical Societies, the delegate from the Siskiyou County Historical Society stated they had eleven hundred members and this included all the important county officials. They had several membership secretaries who continuously worked on increasing the membership. We can successfully follow their example if we show the enthusiasm they have. Let's all make an effort to invite some potential new members to our meetings and invite them to join the Society.

Those who were absent from the September meeting missed a most enjoyable time. Charles Schwoerer, assisted by Louise Oneto, Rose Joseph, and Amon Tanner, gave us many interesting stories of teachers and schools of yesterday.

We are happy to have our good president, Judge Smith, back with us this month. Rumor has it that he will not have to serve alternate months in Los Angeles in the future. Let's hope this will mean he will be with us in Calaveras County more steadily.

The California History Foundation and Dr. Hunt of the College of the Pacific should be congratulated on the success of the Local Historical Societies at Columbia in July. Calaveras was well represented with about eight members in attendance at one time or another during the two days. The delegates voted to make the conference an annual affair and to form a statewide organization, possibly under the sponsorship of the California History Foundation.

C. W.

THE FIRST YEAR

The Calaveras County Historical Society has been in existence for one year. We are proud of our accomplishments. Our meetings have been well attended. The members have found them instructive, interesting and a source of much pleasure. We have regularly published our quarterly bulletins with articles prepared by our members.

No section of California has a more colorful and romantic history than the section in which we live.

Much of the history of Calaveras County has never been written. To reduce some of this to writing and make it available for future generations is one of our goals.

Stories of the accomplishment of the Pioneers and Argonauts in Calaveras County and of those that followed them will be told in our future bulletins. Let us strive to make each coming year better than the last.

J. A. SMITH, President.



Murphys' Band—with "Miner's Cabin" Big Tree behind.

REMINISCENCES OF THE BIG TREES

By ELIZABETH KALER
Murphys, California

Time has such a habit of chinging things, even the road into the Big Trees.

Our first view of the greatness of the Trees was seen while riding in an old stage coach, majestically passing between the Sentinels whose duty it was to guard the entrance; you felt so safe with those watchful keepers at the gate.

But relentless Time thought otherwise so after years of withstanding the storms of winter one of the proud Sentinels fell. It is lying out there now waiting the passing of years until its brother joins it.

I always thought the "Pride of the Forest" the most beautiful but I can't find it. You would almost think they had moved it to some other location—but it isn't that—it's the trails—they've been changed.

You know what they did? They cut the "Father of the Forest" in two—not two equal halves—but they cut it. No wonder I had such a time finding the fallen hero where we used to play "Hide and Seek." Oh, it was such a good place to hide—but it was so dark inside and the one who was "it" couldn't see in but we could see out. He'd be afraid to really come inside looking for us because we could jump out so easily and get in "free." Then he'd try to make a rule, "No fair hiding in the 'Father of the Forest,'" but strange to say the rule was never obeyed.

Then there was the "Mother of the Forest," a grand majestic shaft until it was desecrated by humans. You know they took the bark off section by section to the height of 116 feet or more, then shipped it to London, set it up in the Crystal Palace at the World's Fair so people could see the largest living tree.

One day some years ago I met an elderly gentleman out in the grove and he told me that when he was a little boy his father took him to this World's Fair and he saw the remarkable tree. His father said, "Son, it is only a fake. You mustn't believe those Americans." But, "Now," he said, "Here I am today verifying the bigness of these trees and happy to know that the Americans do tell the truth—sometimes."

"The groves were God's first temples," so said that sweet poet, William Cullen Bryant. I am glad there is a tree named for him—it stands there in the grove, so tranquil, so stately, yet so humble as if meditating on the sacredness of its being.

I can't forget the wonderful dance pavilion on the stump where many happy hours were whiled away.

But why the tree was cut down just to make a stump is more than I know. One of the five men who helped cut it was an old timer of Murphys. His great-granddaughter told me that not long ago she and her family were here visiting in the grove and in speaking to the head Forest Ranger, she boastfully said, "My great-grandfather helped cut this tree." And what do you suppose he answered? "It is nothing to your credit to be telling."

But to come back to one July night in the Past, when Fred Herzer, of happy memory, played for us to dance on the stump. And oh, how he could play and sing too, keeping rhythmic time with his foot. The floor was smooth, the night was cool, the music was sweet, but Time again has stepped in so I'll finish with beloved Joyce Kilmer's poem—

TREES

I think that I shall never see
 A poem lovely as a tree.
 A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
 Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
 A tree that looks at God all day
 And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
 A tree that may in summer wear
 A nest of robins in her hair;
 Upon whose bosom snow has lain
 Who intimately lives with rain.
 Poems are made by fools like me,
 But only God can make a tree.



THE STUMPHOUSE—This house on the stump of the Big Tree cut in 1853 was used for many purposes. In 1858 for a period of four months the Big Trees Bulletin and Murphys Advertiser was published in it. The house was crushed by snow in the winter of 1917 and removed by workmen in the spring.

CALAVERAS GROVE OF BIG TREES

By J. A. SMITH

This is the first grove of Sequoia Gigangtea in California to be discovered after the American occupation. It is located 15 miles northeasterly of Murphys in Calaveras County on the Ebbetts Pass Highway and on the ridge between the North Fork of the Stanislaus River and San Antonio Creek.

The discovery of the Grove is shrouded in a great deal of doubt. The credit is usually given to a man named Dowd and the date sometime in 1852. Dowd is supposed to have been engaged as a hunter during the time the Union Water Company was constructing its canal from the North Fork of the Stanislaus River to Murphys and vicinity, and on one of his hunting expeditions had followed a wounded animal that led him into the Grove.

The name "J. M. Wooster" was carved on the trunk of one of the trees with the date, 1850. Upon being given credit for discovering the trees, Wooster, writing to the San Andreas Independent from Angels Camp under date September 24, 1857, stated that he carved his initials on the tree 12 days after the Grove had been discovered by a man named Whitehead. Wooster states that Whitehead, while on a prospecting tour, leaving Independence Flat to go to the Stanislaus River, discovered the trees about May 20, 1850.

General Bidwell, writing many years after the discovery, claims that he found the trees when he crossed the Sierra Nevada Mountains to reach California.

The land upon which the Grove is located was first privately claimed by Joseph M. Lapham of Sonora, Tuolumne County, who in 1853 had S. H. Marlette, County Surveyor of Calaveras County, residing at Mokelumne Hill,

make a survey of the property in July of that year. This claimant called it "The Mammoth Grove Ranch." An adjoining land claim was made at the same time by a Wm. W. Lapham, who purchased the Joseph M. Lapham land claim in the fall of 1853.

Thereafter, the property passed thru several hands and the major portion of it became the property of A. Smith Haynes, who first conducted a hotel at the Big Trees. The original hotel a two-story building, was built along similar lines to the later Sperry Hotel, though a much smaller building. The later hotel, built by Sperry and Perry, was destroyed by fire of August 17, 1943.

Though permitting the taxes to become delinquent upon his property, Haynes lost his interest in the property in the latter fifties and in 1860 James L. Sperry and John Perry, hotelmen of Murphys, became owners of the Haynes interest. In 1864, Sperry and Perry secured an interest held by one William G. Graham. Apparently Graham conducted the hotel business after Haynes.

For many years thereafter Sperry and Perry as partners conducted hotels at Murphys and the Big Trees. Sperry finally acquired the Perry interest in all the partnership property. While Sperry and Perry were partners they secured government title to the land on which the grove is located and also increased their land holdings to about 2300 acres.

Sperry on July 9, 1874, conveyed a one-half interest in the property, together with other property in Calaveras County for the sum of \$25,000 to Eugene Elias Malbec de Montjoc Marquis de Briges and Marie Rosario Bassena Marquise de Briges (widow of Marie Antoine Albert Malbec de Monjoc Marquis de Briges, deceased), and William Athison Keefer. The deed recites that it conveys one-half of the hotel building, laundry, steam engine and engine house, stable, horses, sheep, livestock of all kind, furniture and personal property of every kind on the premises. Keefer was to have half of the granted premises and the other two grantees a quarter each.

The following December the Keefer interests were conveyed to Marquis de Briges of Paris France, for the sum of \$13,500. The property was thereafter conducted by Sperry and the Marquis. However, disputes arose and Sperry filed a suit in the United States Circuit Court of the Ninth Judicial District, California, against the Marquis and Marquise de Briges. The case went to judgment and a decree was entered in said court ordering the property to be sold at public auction by L. S. B. Sawyer, master in chancery.

The property was advertised for sale and sold at public auction in front of the courthouse door in the Town of San Andreas, Calaveras County, on the 16th day of February, 1878, at which sale S. W. Sperry became the purchaser for the sum of \$14,500, that being the highest sum bid for the property.

On July 23, 1878, the property was conveyed to James L. Sperry, who continued to conduct the resort in his own name until the corporation was formed in April, 1890, and the title conveyed to Big Tree Company, a corporation.

For the next ten years the property belonged to the corporation and during a part of this time Mr. and Mrs. Hutchings of Yosemite Valley conducted the hotel business at the Big Trees. In 1900 the property was conveyed to

Robert Whiteside of Duluth, Minn., and Mr. and Mrs. Job Whiteside continued the hotel business until the death of Whiteside, when Mrs. Whiteside was the sole operator of the hotel property until it was deeded to the State of California in 1931.

DORRINGTON

By LESLIE S. FREEMAN

Based on a Manuscript by Rebecca Gardner Wilson,
The Granddaughter

The story of Dorrington, we might say, began way back in about 1835 in Scotland. It was a beautiful day in the busy harbor of Port Glasgow, Scotland, and in one of the city's lovely homes lived a young and handsome sea captain who was full of excitement and joy of living as he strolled along the wharves, gazing at the great ships of the sea. To make the captain's joy more complete upon this particular day, the stork had delivered a baby to his auburn-haired wife. This happiness was soon to be broken a few years later for one day while the child was romping in the yard and shouting with glee, the captain was seen to kiss his loved ones goodbye and take his ship to sea once more.

The laughing-eyed sea-loving Scotchman and his gallant ship were never heard of again. His wife, a frail, delicate little woman, could not stand her loss and a short time later closed her sad dark eyes and passed away.

The little daughter was taken into the home of her grandmother where she received a good education, but rather strict upbringing. When she was only fifteen years of age she met and fell madly in love with a young man from the City of Paisley. They were married in the quaint little church at Greenock, where a short time later they sadly lay away their first-born son in the churchyard, next to the last resting place of the famous Highland Mary.

Soon after the loss of their son the young couple decided to go to America. They crossed the Atlantic in a sailing vessel and it took them six weeks to reach New York. Here, they found happiness again, though the young wife had many adjustments to make in her living conditions. Long years afterward she used to laughingly tell her grandchildren of the terrible shock she received when she heard a man whistling on her first Sunday in America.

When gold was discovered in California, her husband was again ready to travel. He sailed around Cape Horn and arrived in San Francisco six months later. Once again our Scotch lass showed that the spirit and courage of her father was still carrying on; for when the long-awaited letter from San Francisco arrived, she climbed aboard an old lumbering ship headed for the Isthmus of Panama.

When she had to go up the Chagres River in a small native boat, her formal upbringing received another terrible shock for the natives were clothed in the fashion of their country; a simple breech cloth.

She then took the long, hard ride across the Isthmus on the back of a mule. Then she boarded another steamer and at last came to the welcome harbor of San Francisco, and the still more welcome security of her husband's arms.

I suppose by this time the reader is wondering what all this has to do with Dorrington. Well, the little Scotch girl was Mary Rebekah Dorrington, and it is her maiden

name after which Dorrington was named. The husband that she met in San Francisco was John Gardner and from San Francisco they moved to Angels Camp in 1851, where they lived an exciting and interesting life during the famous gold rush days.

John Gardner, however, was a student and peace-loving businessman at heart and never greatly enjoyed the rough living and excitement of a mining camp. He began looking around the country and finally found the spot he was looking for—a beautiful open meadow in the virgin forest not far from the Calaveras Big Trees which he had learned to love. Best of all, there was the most wonderful cold spring bubbling up at the edge of the meadow and speckled trout played in the little stream flowing from the spring into San Antone Creek.

Up to this time this mountain meadow had only been used as the site of a sheep camp, owned by a couple of pioneer stock raisers named Lurty and Johnson. John Gardner bought the place from them in about 1852 and later he and his family homesteaded the surrounding timber land. He built a hotel which was burned a few years later, and then built the present hotel structure. This was once crushed in by heavy snow, but it was repaired with no material changes. (As I gazed at the hotel building it appeared like a huge tree had fallen through it, no doubt caused by the snow described in the narrative.)

Stock corrals were built and a general merchandise store opened. The place was christened Cold Spring Ranch and so remained till about 1902 when a post office was established. The Post Office Department in Washington objected to Cold Spring Ranch, because there were too many words, and to Gardners, because there were post offices in California whose names were too similar. Then the name Dorrington was submitted and it was accepted.

John Gardner, and later his son, continued to operate the business till 1907 when the place was sold to the Calaveras Timber Company. It had several proprietors after that—Joseph Whittle, Bill Hinkleman, Avery Redmond and Ed Harris, just to name a few, and then Mr. and Mrs. Connel who managed it successfully for a long time. In the year 1948 Mr. and Mrs. Andy Anderson purchased the property, with the exception of a large timber section of some 200 acres across the road which is owned by private parties.

Dorrington served as a toll house for those who wished to travel to Markleeville. It was known as Big Tree and Carson Valley Turnpike, which today represents part of the California State Highway system. Many miners, stock and cattle men stayed over night at the old hotel or ate meals there and on account of its ice cold pure drinking water, gushing from its spring, it was a favorite stage coach stop for weary travelers. (Mr. Anderson tells me part of the old toll road still may be seen for several miles.)

HOW THE CALAVERAS GROVE OF BIG TREES WAS FIRST DISCOVERED

From Scenes in California by Hutchins

Published in San Francisco, 1860

Contributed by J. A. Smith

In the spring of 1852 Mr. A. T. Dowd, a hunter, was employed by the Union Water Company of Murphys Camp,

Calaveras County, to supply the workmen engaged in the construction of their canal with fresh meat from the large quantities of game running wild in the vicinity. Having wounded a bear, and while industriously following in pursuit, he suddenly came on one of these immense trees that have since become so justly celebrated throughout the civilized world. All thoughts of hunting were absorbed and lost in the wonder and surprise inspired by the scene. "Surely," he mused, "this must be some curiously delusive dream." The great realities standing there before him, however, were convincing proof, beyond a doubt, that such were no fanciful creations of his imagination.

When he returned to camp, and there related the wonders he had seen, his companions laughed at him and doubted his veracity which previously they had considered to be very reliable. He affirmed his statement to be true, but they still thought it "too much of a story" to believe—thinking that he was trying to perpetrate upon them some first of April joke.

For a day or two he allowed the matter to rest—submitting with chuckling satisfaction, to the jocular allusions to "his big tree yarn," and continued his hunting as formerly. On the Sunday morning following he went out early as usual, and returned in haste, evidently excited by some event. "Boys," he exclaimed, "I have killed the largest grizzly bear that I ever saw in my life. While I am getting a little something to eat, you make preparations to bring him in. All had better go that can possibly be spared, as their assistance will certainly be needed."

As the big tree story was now almost forgotten, or by common consent laid aside as a subject of conversation; and moreover as Sunday was a leisure day—and one that generally hangs the heaviest of the seven on those who are shut out from social intercourse with friends, as many Californians unfortunately were—the tidings were gladly welcomed; especially as the proposition was suggestive of a day of excitement.

Nothing loath, they were soon ready for the start. On they hurried with Dowd as their guide, through thickets and pine groves; crossing ridges and canyons, flats and ravines, each relating in turn the adventures experienced, or heard from companions with grizzly bears and other formidable tenants of the forests and wilds of the mountains, until their leader came to a dead halt at the foot of the tree he had seen, and to them had related the size. Pointing to the immense trunk and lofty top he cried out, "Boys, do you now believe my big tree story? That is the large grizzly I wanted you to see. Do you still think it is a yarn?"

Thus convinced, their doubts were changed to amazement and their conversation from bears to trees, afterwards confessing that, although they had been caught by a ruse of their leader, they were abundantly rewarded by the gratifying sight they had witnessed; and as other trees were found equally as large they became willing witnesses, not only to the entire truthfulness of Mr. Dowd's account, but also of the fact, that like the confession of a certain Persian queen, concerning the wisdom of Solomon, "the half had not been told."

Write any questions you may have to the editor or secretary and we'll try to find the answers.