



Quarterly Bulletin of the Calaveras County Historical Society
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MY FIRST MEMORIES OF SAN ANDREAS

by L.H. Getchell

As we look back two or three generations, it seems rather amazing to us what great changes have occurred in our daily lives and in almost everything around us. These changes are even more pronounced if we happen to come from a small town such as San Andreas rather than the city.

One of our faithful contributors, L. Harold Getchell, who happens to have a remarkable memory, makes it a practice to put to paper his memories of life in San Andreas when he was young. We think these Getchell stories and descriptions, with his down-to-earth, humorous country style, give us a very clear picture of those days so different from today, but yet not so very long ago. Our readers have seen several of Larry's articles in our pages before, so he should need no further introduction.

Editor

November 15th, 1907, was a day in my life that I remember for two reasons. It was the day we left the mining camp of Sheep Ranch to take up residence in San Andreas. Also, it was my fourth birthday.

On the day mentioned, Dad (Grant Getchell) closed the door of our new Sheep Ranch home, harnessed our young mare Dolly to the two-wheeled cart, and he and Mother, with me in the middle, set off for new horizons. The last few years had not been the happiest ones for my parents because of a serious leg injury that happened to Father when he was working in the carpenter shop at the Sheep Ranch mine. Now, there was little doing at Sheep Ranch after the closing of the mine earlier that same year, and I think they both welcomed a new beginning in San Andreas.

Dolly's mother was a thoroughbred trotter and Dolly had inherited many of her fine qualities, so the ride was



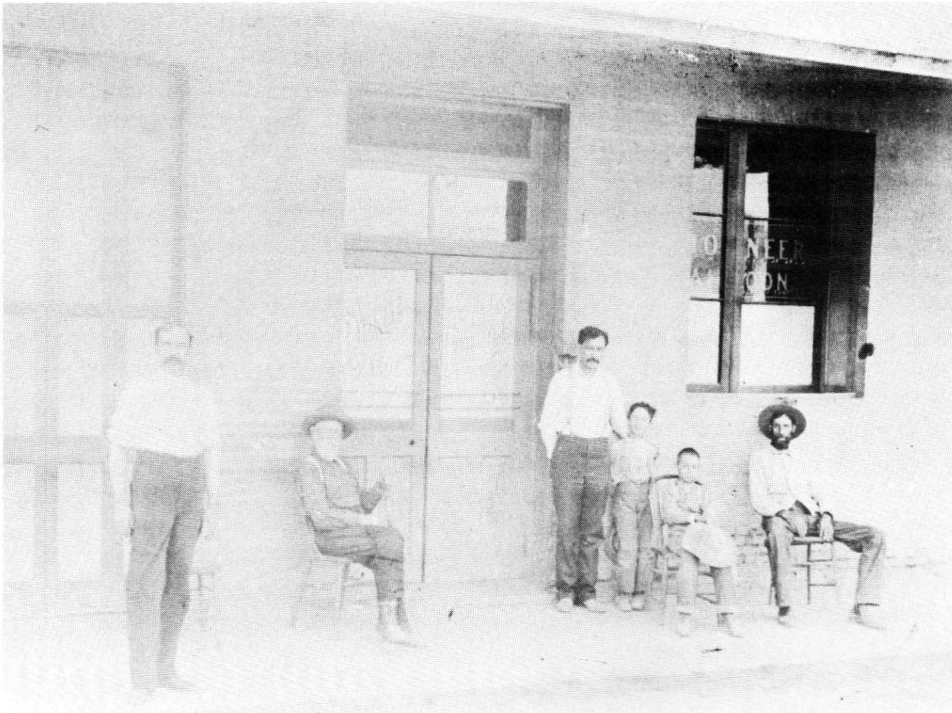
GRANT GETCHELL

1867-1964

*This portrait was taken shortly before he left Sheep Ranch.
Loaned by L.H. Getchell*

probably a pleasant one. Truthfully, I don't recall much about the ride except an incident after we arrived at our new home in San Andreas. This was the lighting of the large, bowl-shaped kerosene lamp that hung above the dining-room table. Up to then I had only been familiar with those small hand lamps, and this large painted one really impressed me. We had not enjoyed the luxury of electricity in Sheep Ranch nor would we in San Andreas for some time to come.

Although a carpenter by trade, my father had operated a saloon in Sheep Ranch prior to his accident, but had sold out at my mother's request and returned to carpentering. It was now his plan to reenter the saloon business in San Andreas. To this end he had made preliminary arrangements with the Wesson family to reopen the Pioneer Saloon at the corner of Main and St. Charles streets. The latter was then generally referred to as China Street although the Chinese had long since moved away.



PIONEER SALOON

This building, on the corner of St. Charles (Highway "49") and North Main, was demolished when the highway was rebuilt in 1955.

Courtesy of L.H. Getchell

It normally takes some capital to open a business but that was a commodity lacking in my father's situation at the time. He had about twenty-five dollars in cash, not much more, and it happened that in the cellar of the Pioneer, left over from earlier operations, there was a barrel of unopened whiskey. Those early-day saloons didn't carry a large variety of alcoholic beverages, but served mostly whiskey that came right out of the barrel in the cellar. The bar owner would simply fill up a few bottles, and this, along with a bottle or two of "call" whiskey, was about all he had available for his thirsty customers. The latter was for the more discriminating, such as the carriage trade, that called for something better than what came out of the barrel. It's been said a few unscrupulous proprietors were known to have filled the call bottle from the barrel if by chance they ran out of the better variety. However, the spread between the two wasn't that great, anyway.

It didn't take long for Father and the Wessons to strike a deal. They gladly took his twenty-five dollars and in return gave him the key to the building and access to the barrel of whiskey. Shot glasses and water glasses were also still in place, so Dad swept, washed the few available glasses and opened his door for business. He also probably picked up a bottle of call whiskey for the back bar, too.

Grant Getchell was no stranger to the citizens of San Andreas, having lived there for the better part of his life. Brother Clarence announced the opening of the

Pioneer in his "Calaveras Prospect". I am not privy to the amount of rent he was expected to pay, but it would not be due until the end of the month. The same held true for the six dollars' monthly rental on our house, owned by Brother Clarence.

The folks in town knew of my father's misfortune and they were quick to help out. George Stewart gave us credit at his grocery store. From some source came a cow, ready for milking. Uncle Gus Vogelsang, who was Mother's sister's husband, dropped by with a freshly-slaughtered sheep, and shortly thereafter several young pigs were cavorting about in the newly-built pigsty down next to the barn. Before the year was out we slaughtered a couple of sizeable porkers, smoked a few hams in our new smokehouse, and pickled the balance in brine for the winter. We also somehow acquired a flock of chickens which took care of the egg problem. So, all in all, we were doing pretty much OK.

Dad had many friends and they were happy to see him open the Pioneer, but the same could not be said for some of the other saloon owners. There were about seven saloons in town, and the economy was hardly booming, depending largely on the business generated by its principal activity, that of being the county seat. County officers were good spenders, especially around election time, and they tried to spread their business around. It was not unusual, during the course of an evening, for those that had been patronizing a particular bar to decide to visit another establishment. In such

instances, the proprietor of the first bar would most likely lock up his place and go along. It was a time of good fellowship and good sportsmanship. However, there was one bar owner who seldom visited the Pioneer, and Dad acted accordingly. This man so resented my father's competition that he did not speak to him for at least twenty years. They had been good friends in Sheep Ranch where they had also been in competition. But in San Andreas, another saloon meant spreading the available dollar just a little thinner. Strangely enough, that bar owner was a very good friend of mine, and his son was with my father. It took a long time but eventually they buried the hatchet. It was mostly a matter of pride.

Several months after we had settled into our new home, quite a commotion took place outside the house down by the barn. Mother was careful to keep me indoors and not even let me look out the window. Later they paraded me out to see Dolly's new colt. It was a filly and they named her Dolly, too. She was a spunky little thing. One day at the barn she kicked her mother in the belly, and, as the saying goes, "While it didn't do her much harm, it didn't do her any good either."

Dad's business prospered sufficiently, so it became apparent that things were going to come out all right. Of course I was a bit too young to understand the problems that beset us or to appreciate the change. Looking back now it is all very clear, especially when we consider the conditions that existed here in the first decade of the century.

Although on the threshold of great new things, it definitely appeared that there had been very little change over the past twenty or thirty years in Calaveras County. Many of the things that are today taken for granted were neither known of nor thought of at the time. It is true that the gasoline buggy was gaining a foothold in the metropolitan areas, but it was still something of a plaything for the adventurous and wealthy, though not necessarily in that order. Horse-power in transportation was generated mostly by the honest and hardworking horse. County roads were often nearly impassable during bad weather even for a trusty and sure-footed steed. I remember hearing of how one man, during a bad storm, tried to drive his rig across San Andreas Creek on his way to Mokelumne Hill and was swept downstream and drowned.

The first automobile I ever saw belonged to Mr. Desire Fricot from San Antone Ridge. He had driven it up from either San Francisco or Stockton and parked it at the head of Main Street for all to see. He wanted to show off a bit to the townspeople, no doubt. This particular vehicle was comparatively large in compar-



MARY and GEORGE WESSON

Society Files

ison with the flivvers of the succeeding years. And it would be quite a few years before we were to see an airplane fly over our county.

Since being practically the only means of transportation, the horse was responsible for much of our way of life. Every resident who owned a horse needed a barn or stable, hay and grain to feed his animal, and a saddle, cart or buggy. Naturally there were no garages then, but the larger towns in the county could boast of two or three stables where they would put your horse up for the night, rub him down and feed and water him – all the comforts a horse should want. If you didn't own a horse and needed transportation, the livery stable would rent you a horse and carriage. An annex to the stable stored a great variety of rigs, suitable for every occasion.

A traveler intending to stay the night usually headed right for the stable. For most of his journey, over the rough and rutty road, it was a bouncy and bumpy ride,

with the iron-tired wheels grinding over the rough ground. But this gave way to a quiet rumble as the horse and carriage left the street and crossed onto the straw-covered planking of the stable floor. From that moment on, a stable hand relieved the traveler of all responsibility by taking charge of the horse or team. He knew exactly what to do and left his customer free to go about his business.

If a town could support two or three livery stables, it would also need a blacksmith shop or two. Their principal function was to shoe the horses and repair the wagon wheels, but they were very adept at producing many iron products with their forge, anvil and hammer. We kids would watch the blacksmith for hours, as he removed the white-hot metal from the forge with his tongs, dip it in a container of water where it really sizzled, and then hammer out the desired shape on the big anvil. It was generally necessary to insert the object into the forge several times for reheating, and then reshaping, before it was completed.

Things one associates with the blacksmith shop were the smith's leather apron, his heavy asbestos gloves, and

the thick carpet of deep black iron filings on the dirt floor of the shop, giving off a sort of silvery glow.

A blacksmith could even fashion such objects as imitation gold nuggets made out of brass. It was not above the conscience of some to make use of such talents of the blacksmith. Our town wit, Bill O'Connell, once had Austin Hall provide him with a few nuggets from his smithy, and then proceeded to "salt" the creek just below the bridge on lower Main Street. This was when the bridge was being rebuilt by a Stockton contractor. Presently a discovery was made, and the bridge crew, foreman and all, spent half a day panning for those glittering nuggets, only to discover the hoax when they tried to convert their "gold" to cash at G. Tiscornia & Company's store. Tiscornia, of course, had been happy, earlier in the day, to sell a number of gold pans! He was shrewd enough to check out any unusual gold with acid before he weighed it out on the scales for payment. Our bridge-builders' nuggets turned as black as the inside of their hats when immersed in this fluid. The following day a sign at the bridge read, "Gold pans for sale - cheap."



WASHBURN'S UNION LIVERY STABLE

The stable was on the east side of lower Main Street, and livery storage was across the street. Clarence

Getchell is holding the horse on the left.

County Museum



MAIN STREET - SAN ANDREAS

The Tiscornia store occupies most of this view, with Gil Pfortner's tonsorial parlor at the left, and the Whitlock and Friedberger buildings on the right.

The Metropolitan Hotel can just be seen at the extreme right.

Loaned by the Tiscornia Family

The local grocer also carried, in addition to the usual food staples, a line of saddles, bridles, harnesses and of course, buggy whips - long and tapered, with an ornately decorated handle and a fluffy tip. After a couple of persuading strokes, deftly applied to the horse's rump, the animal in the future needed no more than a gentle reminder on his back to show obedience to his master's wishes. There were, of course, those drivers with bad tempers, who used to whip to excess and this was frowned on by most everyone.

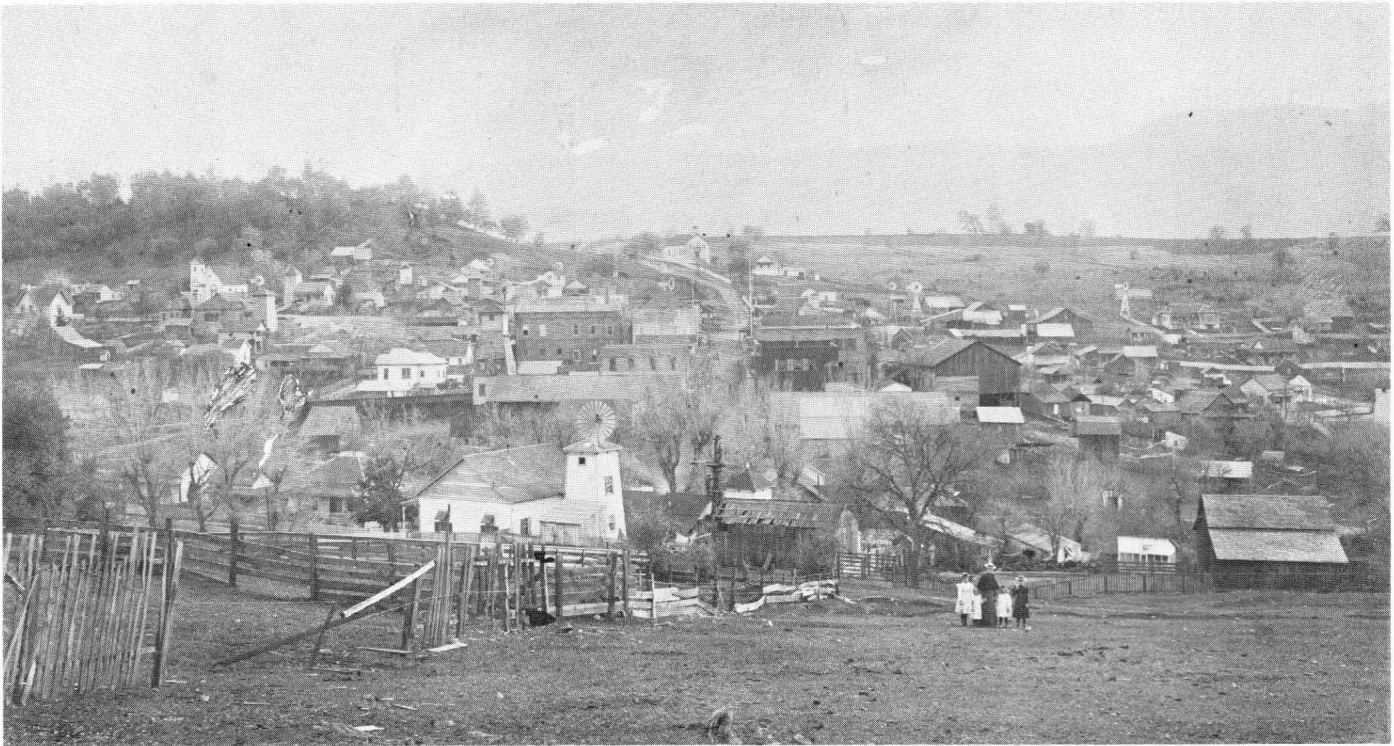
We must not forget those ubiquitous watering troughs, now a thing of the past. When I first came to San Andreas there was a trough in front of almost every establishment that catered to the traveler. Most saloons provided such a convenience so that when a dusty and thirsty traveler arrived in town, he could stop to water his horse and, at the same time, quench his own parched throat inside the saloon. The trough was also a great place in which to toss the town drunk when the latter was caught sleeping off the effects of his excesses. It was great sport to see him spit and sputter as he quickly

sobered up. The air generally turned pretty blue as he clambered out of the trough. Not too fair though, to the horses that had to drink out of the same trough.

The grocer of that day attempted to display his various wares to the best advantage. He usually operated behind a long counter on top of which was a glass case with tempting candy goodies, mouthwatering to the small fry, but out of their reach except when they had a five-cent piece, an amount sufficient then for the purchase of a good-sized bag of the sweet commodity. Delicate, breakable and other such objects were usually displayed high on shelves behind the counter.

Out on the floor of the store, the grocer would have barrels containing dried codfish, dried apples, crackers, and similar commodities. Heavy items such as 100-pound sacks of sugar, and fifty-pounders of flour, along with bags of potatoes, were stored in the back room. You could, of course, buy these items in smaller quantities, but the price was much higher.

Hayrides were very popular, usually starting on a Saturday afternoon for a ride to a neighboring town



SAN ANDREAS AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Most of the town of that day is included in this view. The many tank houses and windmills like those at

the Casey home in the foreground, are prominent in the original photograph.

County Museum

where a big dance or other festive affair was to be held. The young people would arrive just in time to eat, then attend the all-night dance, commencing the return trip right after Sunday morning breakfast. There were some who would catch a little sleep during the ride home but it was pretty bumpy despite the bed of straw. They didn't mind. They were conditioned for this type of recreation and never complained about a little loss of sleep. It's doubtful if the horses enjoyed it, but who knows? Maybe the change of stable and feed suited them as well.

Another one of my memories was the backyard windmills. Lacking a central water supply, each San Andreas home had to have its own well, or access to one. For running water in the house, it was necessary to have an elevated tank, generally enclosed within a tank house, and a windmill to pump the water out of the well up into the tank. Some folk had to be content with just a windlass over the well, and to draw out of the well, a bucket-full at a time, by hand-cranking the windlass. There are still a few tank-houses to be seen in San Andreas but the only windmills left are on ranches out-of-town.

Central heating was mostly unheard of back in those days and most heat was generated from a wood-burning kitchen stove. On a cold winter morning, with the help of some fine pine kindling, Mother would soon have an energetic fire going. When the warmth had spread to the far corners we younger members of the family jumped from our beds and huddled around that old wood-burning range. With bacon sizzling in the pan, a new day was well on its way. Those old wood stoves did a great job. Not only could they turn out meals which many of us consider superior to those prepared on today's modern contrivances, but they could heat up a house, or at least that part in use, better than you would ever imagine. Better homes had fireplaces in the living room, and there were a few with fireplaces in the bedrooms. It took a lot of time, not to mention getting in the wood, to heat with open fireplaces, and you had to watch for sparks lest you set the place on fire. The heat didn't spread out the way it did from the kitchen stove. However, it was nice to get a good fire going in the fireplace of an evening, and crowd around it as the flames spit and popped. Your back may have been a little cool, but you roasted up front.

During the first decade of the century, electricity was not yet in general use in most towns like San Andreas. Kerosene lamps lighted the household, and lanterns were used outdoors. A trip to the barn usually called for a lantern. One could take a nasty spill, searching one's way in the pitch dark. I remember one night after supper, when Dad decided to stay home, he gave me a lantern and instructions for locking up the saloon. It was a real dark night and there were no street lights in town then. Certainly, I was a bit young for such an errand, at five years old. Anyway, about half way there I thought I heard a noise, maybe a lion or a bear! I dropped the lantern on the spot and high-tailed it for home. My parents forgave me, for they realized that it was asking quite a lot of a young lad of my age, even though there was actually no danger in being out at night in San Andreas in those days.

Waiting for the daily mail was a favorite pastime for many in town. Valley Springs was the end of the railroad line from the Valley. A daily stage would pick up the outgoing mail and take it down to Valley Springs and return with the incoming mail, arriving at San Andreas around five o'clock in the afternoon. Our post office then was on Main Street where, at least half an hour before the stage was expected, people would begin to congregate. It was a great place and time to socialize. The two-horse coach handled passengers as well as light merchandise along with the mail. Most of this was loaded at the back of the coach, beneath a canvas covering held in place by leather straps which trailed down behind. The more venturesome of us kids would often wait in hiding at the lower end of town, and when the stage passed we would run and grab ahold of those leather straps and hitch a ride up to Main Street. If the driver was aware of us, he would sometimes lash out

with his whip, although I do not ever remember feeling the brunt of it. I don't think the drivers appreciated us.

When the mail arrived at the post office, the window was closed and would remain so until all the mail was sorted. Those of us with lock-boxes could watch for a letter to slip in, and then if we knew our combination would quickly open it to see what mystery it would disclose. Those without boxes had to be content to patiently wait in the line until the window opened.

Mr. Floyd was our postmaster, and he was a Republican. Post office appointments then were political plums, and the White House was occupied by a Republican. The Democrats didn't come back into power until the second decade, when George Treat was appointed postmaster. The post office was moved across the street with quarters for the Treat family upstairs. Old Mr. Floyd, incidentally, had been a member of the Getchell party that came from Machias, Maine, in 1859.

Our circumstances had improved considerably during the year following our move to San Andreas. Late in the summer of 1909, my parents decided that it was time to celebrate, especially as a Barnum & Bailey Circus was performing in Stockton. Again we hitched Dolly to the two-wheeler and were on our way. We started early to make the forty-five mile trip to Stockton. My main recollection of the trip was the crossing of the toll bridge at Genochio's at the North Fork of the Calaveras River. I recall Dad saying that the toll amounted to twenty-five cents. Then I remember his pointing out the "Seventeen Mile House", a road stop along the way, but we did not stop. Our first stop was, I believe, near Jenny Lind where we unhitched Dolly so she could rest and get a bite to eat. Those hay-burners needed fuel too. I also think we had a late breakfast

VALLEY SPRINGS STAGE

Fred Winkler on his way, with the stage full of passengers, to meet the train at Valley Springs.

Gift of Mrs. Edna Dickhaut



Calaveras County Historical Society

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there, and I am sure Dad visited the bar. This was professional courtesy. You made it a point to do this, expecting the favor to be returned sometime.

That afternoon we rolled into a very large Stockton livery stable. The attendants made a great to-do over Dolly and the speed with which we had made the trip. In fact, the next day they put Dolly in one of their racing rigs and took her out to the track for a trial run. According to Dad, she made the run in good time.

We stayed in Stockton for several days. Of course the circus was the big moment in my life. The lions and tigers were in their cages, outside the tent, where the elephants were, also. I tossed a few peanuts to them and looked in astonishment at the way they handled their versatile trunk in shelling and eating the nuts.

The action on the inside was something to behold. The clowns and the acrobats up on the high wire were the hits with me. But my biggest kick came from another source. There was a turntable that looked to be going a mile a minute. Up on top of this table was a little donkey who was "picking them up and laying them down," going nowhere but keeping up with that turning table. Finally they stopped the table and took the donkey off. When they started it turning again, several of the clowns congregated around it. After looking it over for a bit, one of the clowns climbed up and stepped out onto the turning table. His idea was to emulate the little donkey, but he had no sooner touched the turning top than it threw him off, tumbling head over heels, but landing on his feet. Then another of the clowns tried it with similar results. Those clowns were very acrobatic. No matter how far the table threw them, they always landed back on their feet.

Well, this was just too much for me. We were sitting in something similar to bleacher seats, open in back and about seven or eight rows up. I laughed so hard that I lost my balance and fell through the open back, hitting the ground with a thud. I don't remember much



LARRY GETCHELL

*Our author at an early age before he lost his curls.
Courtesy of L.H. Getchell*

after that but was later told that Dad, stiff leg and all, swung down after me. There happened to be an attendant there who picked me up and handed me to Dad. I was badly shaken up, but with no real damage. I sat through the balance of the show, but went easy on the laughter for the rest of the afternoon.

These are some of my remembrances of that first decade of the Twentieth Century in San Andreas. School awaited me for the second.

ANY BARNs FOR SALE?

Here's your chance to get rid of that old barn up on the ranch. We recently received the following letter on the subject.

I am interested in purchasing barns, with or without land, that have been abandoned and / or need to be moved.

C. Ann Erb
1930 Stewart St. #D6
Santa Monica, CA 90404