

ALVIN FRIOUX HELPS DEFEAT THE KAISER

by Larry Getchell

For one who's life comes close to spanning the Twentieth Century there are things that just naturally stick out in my mind. During those early years while growing up there were certain happenings that I still remember. In addition to a life style much different than today's, there were other things that stick in my mind. It appears to me that in my home town of San Andreas we had an abundance of unusual characters and it is about one such I would like to share a memory with you.

The character I have a reference to was a young man named Alvin Frioux. I remember him best for an anti-Churchillian remark he made that I still remember as though it were yesterday. But first I think it would be helpful

to furnish a little background material that has to do with life styles along the Mother Lode during those early years.



**Judge Patrick Henry Kean,
who held the admiration of the author.**

Our family took up residence in San Andreas on my fourth birthday, November 15, 1907. It would be another four or five years before things material came to my attention. The first of these took place during the 1912 Presidential election when Teddy Roosevelt bolted from the Republican party and ran as an independent. Backed by important personalities, one being the well known newspaper man Allan S. White, he who wrote that famous article "What's the Matter with Kansas?", Teddy tossed his hat in the ring using the unusual moniker, "The Bull Moose Party." I remember

What's the Matter with Kansas?

Nothing was the matter with Kansas, if you were a member of the Populist Movement whose stronghold was in Kansas in 1896. William Allen White (not Allen S. White, as Larry noted) was the editor of a small town newspaper in Kansas, the **Emporia Gazette**. White wrote a fiery editorial in the heat of anger, blasting the Populists at the height of their movement in the presidential election between their choice of candidate William Jennings Bryan and his opponent (White's favored) William McKinley. When White cooled down, he attempted to withdraw the editorial but it had already gone to print. Much to his surprise, the piece was reprinted across the country and launched White toward national prominence in his chosen political party. He is considered an eminent Kansan, ironically from having denounced the state. The William Allen White School of Journalism of the University of Kansas is named for him.

because of the large white sign across the front of the old Friedberger building reading, "Bull Moose Headquarter." This famous building that once housed the watering hole of the legendary Pat Keene [Kean], still dispensed liquor but under the proprietorship of the Casey Brothers. Voting at the time was a man's-only privilege. It would be three more years before women's suffrage would take affect. As a result much of the electioneering took place in the saloons of which there were several up and down Main Street.

This split in the Republican Party resulted in the election of the Democrat, Woodrow Wilson as our president. During his term of office war broke out over in Europe. Wilson promised to keep us out of the war when he ran again in 1916. By now the ladies would also be voting. For this one and only time mother cancelled father's vote by voting for Wilson. She believed him when he said he would keep us out of the war. Of course it wasn't long thereafter that he and the Congress declared war on the Central Powers and joined up with the Allies. It's about how this affected the life of Alvin Frioux that has prompted me to write this piece.

Jobs in San Andreas for young fellows like Alvin were as scarce as hen's teeth. That didn't bother him a bit. One could say he lived a hermit's life and had no interest in gainful employment. His home was a small cabin out on "Merry" Creek [Murray], so called by us when I was a small boy. It was crossed by a small bridge on the old road to Mokelumne Hill about two and a half miles out of town just past the slaughter house. Below the bridge and to the left was our favorite swimming hole during early summer. Up stream to the right was Alvin Frioux's cabin. Here he raised a few chickens and planted a vegetable garden. His staple needs were few, a slab of bacon, some dry beans and a sack of flour. These together with a few other items, eggs from the chickens and vegetables from the garden took care of those needs. For cash he set out a trap line in the forest area behind his cabin. There was a demand and ready cash for animal pelts and from his catch he realized sufficient cash to satisfy all his wants. This life style left him considerable leisure time most of which he spent in town. Taking advantage of the chairs and bench in front of the Pioneer Saloon at the corner of Main and China Streets, the latter changed to St. Charles, the town loiterers daily congregated here to discuss important matters? These generally turned to how wonderful it would be to strike it rich in gold along with the subject pertaining to the feminine gender, not necessarily in that order.

The Honorable P. H. Kean

The "legendary" Pat Kean referred to in this piece was the Honorable Pat Kean, a justice court judge from San Andreas who presided over several notorious cases at the turn of the century. *Las Calaveras* is familiar with Judge Kean. See the issue of January of this year. Judge Kean was probably somewhat of a local folk hero, at least in the eyes of the author when he was a young boy. The personal habits, such as his favorite watering hole, were probably intimacies relished by the young boy. Pat Kean's name can still be seen inscribed in the concrete step fronting the current County Archives on Main Street, also known as the Zwinger building or the Fricot building.

Most men of that day were prisoners of the obnoxious weed tobacco. There were pipe smokers, cigar smokers and most commonly, cigarette smokers. The pipe and cigarette smokers relied on a fresh can of Prince Albert tobacco. There being no tailor made cigarettes, these smokers rolled their own and the Prince Albert brand was their favorite. But frugal folks like Alvin smoked a brand called Bull Durham that came in a fully packed little sack. It opened and closed by means of a draw string and was of a size to fit comfortably in a shirt pocket. The circular tab at the end was always allowed to hang out. The contents were not moist but dry and sort of flakey. There were those who claimed the contents were the sweepings from the tobacco company floor. The cost of five cents a pack suited the users just fine. Cigarette smokers soon became adept at rolling their own. Holding a Wheatstraw cigarette paper in their left hand, slightly cured in a "V" shape, a layer of Bull Durham would be deftly shook into the crease and then rolled to a cylinder and sealed with a bit of saliva. This was the simple life of Alvin Frioux.

I had but recently graduated from the eighth grade in grammar school and was looking forward to entering high school later in the year

Women's Suffrage

Larry would have liked for his mother to have voted for Woodrow Wilson, but she didn't. It's true that Wilson had hoped to keep the United States out of the European conflict, but we entered the war in 1917 anyway. This was still a few years before women had won the vote.

It was not until the nineteenth amendment of the United States was passed by congress on June 4, 1919, and ratified on August 18, 1920, that women were guaranteed the right to vote. Wilson's second term of office ended in 1921.

when news of our entry in the war reached San Andreas. It wasn't too long before there was a meeting in the Metropolitan town hall to discuss ways for us to assist the war effort. Housewives felt they were doing their part when attempting to bake a loaf of bread, using a little white rationed flour along with that substitute black stuff. Mother tried but it was a lost cause. Bakery bread was not available.

Shortly there was a draft of young men 21 to 31. A bit later we were advised that the first group



The San Andreas WWI Band, all members who were known to the author.

What was "black" flour?

Larry was ahead of himself in this war-effort recollection. Civilian war rations weren't enacted until the second world war. A typical family received six pounds of flour a week. The inconvenience must have made enough of an impression on him that such patriotic spirits probably overlapped his enthusiastic youthful recollections. It was fair to say that any housewife would have been inconvenienced by the use of the flour substitutions that families were required to make do with in lieu of the normal wheat flour they desired. Typical substitutions were cornmeal, buckwheat, or rolled oats. Mothers probably called the less-refined buckwheat flour "black" flour in frustration.

of draftees would assemble in San Andreas on a Saturday and on a Sunday be conveyed to Valley Springs, there to board the local to Lodi from which point they would be sent to the various boot camps. The town went all out to plan a proper send off. There would be a Saturday night dance and our girls promised the boys would not lack partners.

The eventful day finally rolled around and as it wore on the boys began to filter into town. Most were accompanied by relatives. Immediately upon arrival they were greeted by town folks who lost little time escorting them to the nearest saloon. Not too many were serious drinkers but they were starting on a mission of which they knew practically nothing and without the slightest idea of where they were going. So many threw caution to the wind. One such was Alvin Frioux. The latter had no objection to an occasional libation providing he did not have to pay for it. However when the liquor drummer hit town he led the procession that followed the fellow as he visited each saloon in turn. The liquor drummer would of course spring for drinks for the house at each stop. By the same token Alvin accepted all invitations on the fateful Saturday. On that day some of the boys over imbibed and Alvin was one of them. A few didn't make it to the dance but not Alvin. He didn't dance but was much in evidence at the entrance to the dance hall. To reach the dance floor one had to

climb a flight of stairs that made a sharp angle turn half way up. At the turn there was a sizeable platform and here the men often dropped down for a quick smoke while others who did not dance gathered to discuss whatever came to mind. Alvin had stationed himself on the landing, propping his body against the wall but was still not too steady. He also was suffering from what we usually referred to as a crying jag. That didn't keep Alvin from talking, mostly about the conflict over in Europe. It was at this point I heard his remark I referred to earlier. There was a tear in his eye and a sob in his voice as he said, "It's not the Kaiser that's got me worried it's the crossing that pond."

The dance was over by three in the morning and we rushed home for a few hours rest before journeying to Valley Springs with the draftees' caravan the following morning. Stationed at the platform in Valley Springs was the steam engine and a couple of parlor cars that would shortly be transporting our boys to we knew not where. Hugs and kisses lost their identities as the goodly sized crowd bid their farewells to the boys. A seven [eight] piece band had been hurriedly assembled to play for the occasion. Numbered in that group was Les Stewart on the coronet, George Dietz on his small horn, Clarence Getchell on the bass drum and Hughie Watt on his small trumpet.

Time Tricks the Memory

Larry Getchell contributed many articles to *Las Calaveras* over the years, as well as wrote for the **Calaveras Prospect**. One article he wrote for *Las Calaveras*, April-July 1980, illuminated the lively community bands, one of which is described in this article. In that earlier piece, Larry also recalled Alvin Frioux's emotional comment, but slightly differently. In that earlier version, Larry recalled Alvin saying "It ain't the Huns that's got me worried, it's a 'crossin' that pond."

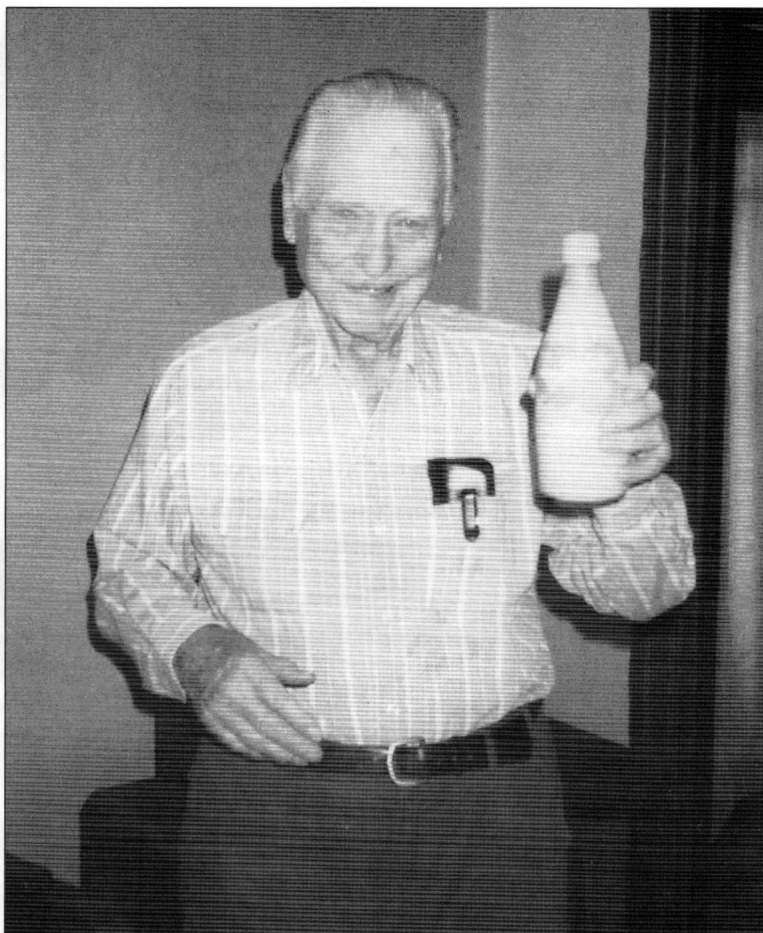
When Larry wrote this piece in 2000, he claims the names of three of the seven piece band members escaped him. This was not a problem, as his memory was just fine twenty years earlier when he wrote the earlier article and he named all *eight* members of the band!

There were three others but their names escape me. Among those bidding farewell to the boys was pretty Clara Scott. She was later married to Warren Scott but single at the time and I do not know her single name. The Scotts were apparently married during 1921 when Warren purchased our former Sheep Ranch home from my father. Almost seventy years later I visited the Scotts in our old home.

The boys finally boarded the coaches from where from the windows they waived at us and we waived right back. Then suddenly there was a burst of steam from the engine and then it and the coaches started moving slowly down the tracks. The engine now started belching steam in earnest and the engineer was laying on the whistle for all it was worth. It didn't take them long to reach the turn at the edge of town where it was soon out of sight. A stillness now came over the crowd as they began slowly moving in the direction of their transportation. It was an eventful day and one I shall always remember.

The war wore on but following the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, the boys soon started arriving home. Among them of course was Alvin, proudly wearing his corporal uniform. Never suffering from any kind of inhibitions he was even more garrulous on his return. During his stay over seas he found a proper niche for his talents, that of mess cook. The dough boys never enjoyed more tasty Alvin baked beans. His main criticism and one he didn't hesitate to expound on was contempt for his so called "Sears and Sawbuck First Lieutenants." It wasn't too long before he returned to his old stand out on Merry Creek. On frequent visits to town he continued wearing his army uniform and did so until it was worn out.

I left San Andreas July 4, 1922 and although I returned frequently to visit my parents I am unable to comment further on the fortunes of Alvin Frioux. However I don't hesitate to say his life was a bit unusual. Don't you agree?



Larry Getchell, proudly showing off an old bottle, in 1992.
All photos courtesy of the Calaveras County Historical Society.

Author Larry Getchell

Author Larry Getchell was born in Sheep Ranch and raised in San Andreas. Although he spent most of his life in the Bay Area, he maintained strong ties to his home community. His family owned the **Calaveras Prospect** and he later became a vigorous contributor to the paper. He also contributed copiously to the Historical Society, and maintained a lively correspondence with at least three editors over the years.

This story is an entertaining but authentically first-hand account of the lighter side of war on a community. One can picture Larry in his later years recalling the events as they unfolded before the sparkling but naive eyes of the boy at the outset of the first world war, where everything was new and exciting. It is amusing that a little comment by an emotional, liquor-driven young man made such an impact on the boy that it was still recalled as something wondrous over eighty years later.

Larry Getchell passed away in 2001, just a few years shy of his one hundredth birthday.

Calaveras County Historical Society

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The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit corporation. It meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the County. Locations and scheduled programs are announced in advance. Some meetings include a dinner program, and visitors are always welcome.

The Society operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10:00 to 4:00 in the historic County courthouse located at 30 Main Street in San Andreas.

The Society's office is located in historic San Andreas, the Calaveras County seat. Visitors are always welcome to stop by the office for assistance with research, and are encouraged to visit the museum while in the area. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:00, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: CCHS@goldrush.com.

New Members

The Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

March 2007

Craig McDonald, Huntington Beach
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Donations

The Historical Society is grateful for the following donations:

March 2007

Photo of Gwin mine and negative
—Vickie Sanders, Stockton

Reason McConnell photo album photos
—Dr. William Renwick

Framed O'Byrnes Ferry display; Manuscript:
Mother Lode Region by R.P. Ricard, 300 pages
—Kathy Kirkpatrick, Stockton

April 2007

Cloth cement plant bag; map of gold districts; and set
of cement plant annual reports—Willard P. Fuller, Jr.,
San Andreas

May 2007

Photo of Mark Twain statue and Flower family—
Harleigh Winkler/Genealogical Society, Angels Camp