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## THE DILL MURDER CASE

The great gold rush to California attracted a wide variety of persons. There were adventurers from all walks of life — some were men desperate for money; others were fleeing the hangman's noose or perhaps just the county sheriff, and others were escaping from a life that for one reason or another was unbearable to them. The majority, however, were just looking for a better opportunity, or a fresh start, leaving loved ones at home only till they could send for them, or until returning themselves with a quickly-won fortune. A few of the more adventurous even took their families on that first hard trip west.

Many of the Argonauts came home within a few years. Others stayed in the Far West. A considerable number were victims of illness or accident, or died a violent death at the hands of criminals, and countless persons simply disappeared from sight. Some became the family heroes, but others were purposely put out-of-mind by their relatives who stayed behind and who, in many cases, shouldered extra responsibilities because of it.

We are not sure just how James F. Dill of Mount Vernon, Iowa, fitted into this scheme of things. We think that he parted from his young wife, Martha Ann Harbert Dill, under rather strained circumstances. Perhaps Martha's parents were a strong factor in this, for they were known to be stern and forceful. The loss of James' and Martha's only child, at two months, was certainly a tragic factor in the parting. In any event we find James Dill and his brother Jeremiah in California in 1853, and we will see that James didn't lack in courage, one of the necessary qualities of an Argonaut. He writes to Martha from Napa, on June 26th:

Dear Martha I take this oportunity to inform you that I am well and I hope that these few lines ma finde you in the same state of health it seems all most seseles for me to rite to you for I have sent Eleven to you and this makes the twelf one and I have never got but the one and that was the one that you sent to mormen Island. . . I am working in Napa Valy in Napa County near the town of Napa I do not no how long I will stay hear Jeremiah has wote to me to come to him I think that I will go after harvest is over. . . Martha I have got some money to sende to you but it is out of my power to



**MARTHA ANN HARBERT DILL**  
1832 - 1894

Martha Ann was born in Hillsboro, Fountain County, Indiana, the first-born of Richard Jerome Harbert and Mary Ann (Polly) Zumwalt. Her brothers and sisters were Joseph, Letitia, Mary Ann, Galena and Huldah. In 1845, the Harberts moved to Iowa and settled in Mount Vernon, Linn County, Iowa. Martha was married to James F. Dill in 1848 at Marion, Iowa. The only child, George Beldon, was born in 1851 and died when two months old. Ten years after James' murder, Martha married Daniel J. Simmons of Blairstown, Benton County, Iowa. The Simmons had one child, William.

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sende it now for I cannot obtain a check frome hear at this time without gowing to San Francisco and I can not go at this time tho I shall sende it as soon as I can I recon you think that it is a long time coming but Martha you cannot think the time any longer than I do I am sure and I hope when we get together a gain that the times will all pas away better than they do now or even did before you ma think the time long Martha but you are thire with youre Father and Mother & I am heare all most a lone & I am shure that time can not seam as long to you as it dose to me I often wish that I could have you hear but Martha I never (want) you to come against youre own free god will I think if you was hear we could go back rich the reason I say go back is because I think you would not bee conted to live hear many years tho the Valleje is

handsome & the climate is pleasant the towns & Citys is butiful we have some mud hear in the winter but no rain in the Summers thire is a greate harvest hear I have got the Job of raking 250 akers off ove a reefer there is one field joining the one that I am to work in to thousand akers in & it is all in barley it makes a nice show to see so mutch grain hear it looks as if the people ment to live hear as well as any place els my eyes has got nearly well once more and I am very proude off it and very thankfill likewise for I thought that I should have to go blinde I wish that I had you hear to wash my shirts for I am so stingy that I will not give too bits to have a luckry shirt washed I would rather do it myself and by that means I do not have a clean shirt very often becaus I cannot wash them very clean tho I do my best with them when I git at it I blister my fingers some times then I think that I never will try to wash anymore but when my shirt gets dirty I try it a gain Well then when that is done then thire is a hole in my pants well then I must go and mend that or els my knee will stick out then some one will laugh at me and you ought to have youre wife hear well by that time that is done thire is something els to do and by that means I do not get mutch rest at night then I lay and think off you and the rest off my folks untill I fall to sleep and often dream off you but I cannot have you hear to tell my dreams to when a wake up in the morning Martha direct youre letters to Napa and if I leave hear I will let you no it in time so that you can direct them whaire I ma go to I think I will go to Sonora to Jeremiah I have no more to tell you at present but to give my best respects all off my friends tho I give them all to yo first so no more but still remain as your affectionat husband

James Dill to Martha A. Dill

Dill was not much of a speller and his grammar leaves a great deal to be desired, but he did get the idea across, and his letters give us a clear picture of the thoughts and impressions of a homesick gold seeker from the Middle West in far-away California. Only three of his letters were saved. After the harvesting was over in Napa Valley, he went to Sonora to join his brother. On February 21st he wrote from that place:

Dear Martha

I take this oportunity of informing you that I am well and I received youre letter dated January 2nd of '54 I received a latter frome Jacob They was all well at that time They want us to come home very mutch but my wants is the largest tho I hope that I will have them suplidge before a very long time I would like it very well if I coulde come home this spring but it is imposible for me to do so it seams like evry thing is a gainst me but I must crall before I walk but I think if nothing hapens I think I will soon lirn irley in the sumer as I have got too claims that looks prospers for me I have not hirde anything frome Stewarte nor M Donahoo latly James R. Bartley was hear with us a few

days a go he is well at present he says he thinks that he will go to olde Iowa next fall and if it is posible I will come with him which I think I can. . . I have not got anything of great intrust for you this time give my respects to all inquireing friends I hope that some of them will rite to me when they want to hear frome me so no more but still remain as youre

Jas. F. Dill

The last letter that we have James wrote from Sonora on April 8th, 1854. It sounds as though things were going better for him. His improving punctuation makes this letter easier to read.

Dear Martha

I take this oportunity of informing you that I have just received a letter from and was rejoised to hear that you aire all well. I am well at present with the exception of my eyes. They aire failing very fast for a while back but I am inhopes they will git better now as I have quit working after night. I have not one a day worke in day light for the last six weeks until yesterday but I think I will quit it now for a while for I have got to think that good eyes is worth all the golde that lays in any one county in California if my eyes do not git better by the middle or the last of June I will come home if I can see out and if they do git better I will not git home quite so soon I received a letter from mother. They waire all well in Illinois when she rote and says that times is very good thire and thinks that Jery can do as well thire as he can hear and wants us to come home very mutch and wants him to rite when he will come but he says that he is not sadisfide yet. Well I am not sadisfide yet as far as the golde is consirned but with the balence I am I think. Thire is a large piece of golde founde now and then but it is not my lot to finde my pile in that way tho it ma be yet before I take my leave frome California I will hope for it if I never receive it thire is nothing like living in hopes. . .

Dill then rants a bit about Martha's brother Joe who came west briefly, possibly to try to unite the young couple. Obviously James was not very fond of his in-laws. He concludes his letter almost prophetically:

Now I must winde up by saying that you must live in hopes a little while longer. give my respects to all So no more but still remain as yours until death

J. F. to Martha A. Dill

Jeremiah wrote a letter to his sister-in-law, Martha a fortnight later, heading it "Mormund Creek Sonora." His letter is a little hard to decipher, for his handwriting, spelling and grammar were all rather bad. He mentions the problems of heavy rains in their mining. He says he likes California and its climate very much, more than James does. He points out the difficulties in bringing families across the plains, and asks Martha to find a pretty girl for him in Iowa. "That is a bout all the way that you will ever get me at home."

The last letter from Jeremiah was written on October the 30th, 1854, from "Sanatone Calavaris Co." and contained some startling news, now two months old.

Mrs Martha

I know have taken a pain task which should a ben done conciderberlysooner But I think my a pologize will be sufficient James was murdered August the 24 near wher I stay By a man By the name of Howard Moppin with out any cause he was shot about a leven o clock and I di not get to him until near twelve. . . the man made his escape so far I hope and trust it will be but a short time when I may se his face. . .

Apparently this Maupin for some reason greatly disliked Michael who must have been an associate of the Dills.

they had some words and Michael left for cattle to the valey James was tending to a shop for us and I was stopping at another camp some 5 miles from them in an other shop Michael says while he was gon this man said he would kill him and James was a telling him when this man came a long and heard parts of the conversation Michael turned to hime and said I under stand you say you intend to kill me and the man ran a few steps before he made any reply and staped in a house Says that it was a li. . . and he tolde him all he asked of him was to let him a lone and he would do the same Mike was some uneasy and James told him that he need not be for all he had to do was if he came in the way was to kick him out

Jeremiah states that Maupin was a man that neither of them associated with, and that he was not well liked. He then goes on to describe in detail the shooting:

Mikel the nest morning went to the Black smith shop with a young horse to get shod said he would go and help the smith to shoe him they with severel others went and they shod the horse and started back to the shop Michael wase some 4 or 5 steps be hind when this man made his appearance in a dore some twenty feet from Michael called to him to stop. . . he had time to see hoo had spake to him he fiard a Barrel of a double barrel gunn at him but mised him and Michael fell from his horse on the opposite side and they all thought he was shot and all ran to him but James who ran to ward Moppin I suppose to keep him from shooting a gane at Michael and he got with in a bout five feet and Moppin turned the gunn and shot him rite side with five buck shot and to small shot Michael rise to his feet by the time the gunn cracked and they all run to James. . . there was a young man heard some one say that this man shot James and (he) started to James and seeing this man araning he started after him and got in a few steps and he (Moppin) turned around and pointed the gun at him and he still thought that he had one barrell loaded and stoped and then after a running a few steps he threw the gunn and the man still pursued him but he got

to the mountains which was but a bout a hundred yards some fifty men followed him in the brush but all done no good the allarm was given and in one hour their was mor than three hundred men on the look out for him

Michael started with a man to Stockton and to Sacramento Hang town and several places and warned all of the officers in those places and their was men every direction but do no good I went to Stockton and got to horses that was on the pasture and started with another man until I was sadisfide I could not finde him that direction and on my way back I stoped some miles from home to get diner and making som enquires I got a good description of him at a camp 50 miles from their I hired fresh horses and started with another man which was well acquanted with the place it was a considerbley out of the way camp. . .

This ended the page and the rest of the letter has been lost. We wonder why Jeremiah waited two months before writing to the widowed Martha. He may have been hoping to tell her at the same time that they had captured the murderer.

Maupin changed his name to Pike and eluded his pursuers for more than three years. In the fall of 1855, young Ben Thorn was elected Constable of the Township that included San Antone Camp and was appointed Deputy Sheriff. He immediately began to hunt down the many absconded murderers who had committed their crimes in that vicinity and to bring them to justice. Howard Maupin was one of these criminals arrested by the intrepid Thorn.

Maupin was arraigned before Judge Charles M. Creanor of the 5th Judicial District Court at "Mok Hill" on October 8th, 1857. He was charged with manslaughter and tried on Thursday, February 11th, 1858. "Bloody Bill" Higby, District Attorney, prosecuted for The People and attorneys Badgley and Dudley defended. Eight witnesses were called by Higby, and there were three for the defense. The jury returned a quick verdict of guilty and two days later Judge Creanor sentenced Maupin to three years hard labor at the State prison.

Permission to print these letters was given by Martha Dill's great-grandniece, Mrs. Lorraine Harbert Albright, who also loaned the picture of Martha.

## Forthcoming Meetings

- January 22nd—Dinner at Perry Hall, Valley Springs. The Roaring Twenties, by Leonard Covello.
- February 26th—San Andreas. Livery Stables and Garages, by J. Carley and L. Stewart.
- March 26th—San Andreas. Early Day Entertainment.
- April 23rd—Dinner meeting. History of Agriculture, by Coke Wood. Place to be announced.

## CALAVERAS TELEPHONE COMPANY

Our member, Leon Rovetta, tells the story of the Felix telephone in "The Saga of Barbwire Jim," in the November issue of the Pacific Telephone magazine, "p. m. t."



# OFFICERS OF CALAVERAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Editor of Las Calaveras ..... W. P. Fuller, Jr., San Andreas

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The Calaveras County Historical Society, a non-profit corporation, meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Grange Hall in San Andreas—except for dinner meetings which are held each quarter at different places in the county.

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## Recent Meetings

Our October dinner was held at the Covenant Church in San Andreas. Mr. Raymond Hillman, the energetic young curator of History at the Haggin Museum, gave an exceptionally interesting talk on "Steamboating around Stockton," well illustrated with numerous slides pertaining to this subject.

In November, we met at the Grange Hall, San Andreas, to hear a program on "Early Stage Stops and Inns of Calaveras." Papers were presented by Miss Bessie McGinnis, Mrs. Myrtle Jones, Mrs. Bessie Airola and Mrs. Otta Leonard on the Shannon House, Pool's Station, Hawk-eye House, and Tower Ranch, respectively.

On December 18th, our annual Christmas program took place at the Grange Hall. Mrs. Alice Eldridge was program chairman and presented a panel of A. F. S. exchange students followed by choral singing and then group singing by the audience.

President Al Gross has appointed two important committees this fall. One, under the chairmanship of George Nelson, has been organized to find adequate quarters for the Society's archives and files, and to organize and index the large amount of material now with the Society. The second, the Bicentennial Committee, will set up a program in honor of the State celebration, which will take place during 1970. As County organizer of this event, the Society will receive Calaveras County's share of the proceeds of the sale of the Bicentennial medallions.

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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR TREASURER

There are still a few members who have not yet paid their 1969-70 dues.

DREW GARLAND

## SOCIETY NEWS AND NOTES

### Museum Workshop at Stockton

Several members of the Society attended the annual museum workshop of the California Conference of Historical Societies held on November 8th and 9th at the Haggin Museum in Stockton. It proved to be an excellent opportunity to see what goes on behind the scenes at the finest such establishment in the area. The Haggin Museum is devoted primarily to History (California, Stockton, and Southern Mines) and to Art (Worldwide). A small but well-indexed library is available to researchers in local history.

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### Back Issues

We regret to report that due to heavy demand for our back issues recently, 21 issues of Volumes I through IX are now out of print, and several more are in very short supply. We urge those members who wish to purchase back issues to do so as soon as possible. These may be obtained from the Secretary at 50 cents a copy. Any member wishing to sell old issues may place a notice in LAS CALAVERAS.

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Some of the issues still in print:

- Vol. 1, No. 1—Early Calaveras; Angels Mine Disaster, etc.  
No. 2—Indians of Calaveras County.
- Vol. 2, No. 2—Ebbetts Pass Road; O'Byrnes Ferry Bridges.  
No. 4—Calaveras County Bridges and Ferries.
- Vol. 4, No. 4—Mountain Ranch - El Dorado; Cave City;  
Table Mountain Ditch; Pony Denig; Murder of E. Said.
- Vol. 6, No. 2—Valley Springs; News Items of 1851.  
No. 3—Calaveritas.  
No. 4—Paloma; L. M. Schrack; Glencoe.
- Vol. 7, No. 1—Sheepbranch Mine; Rich Gulch; Rock  
Fences, etc.  
No. 3—Big Trees - Carson Valley Road; Alice  
Bouldin.  
No. 4—Mokelumne Hill.
- Vol. 9, No. 1—One Hundred Years in Copperopolis.  
No. 4—The Stone Houses of Lost City.
- Vol. 10, No. 1—Blue Mountain City; Sandy Gulch, etc.

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### New Members

We welcome these residents and friends of Calaveras County to the Society:

- Mr. Carlo M. De Ferrari, Sonora
- Mr. and Mrs. Earle Raggio, Angels Camp
- Mrs. Frances Tower Henry, Salt Springs Valley
- Mr. and Mrs. Louis R. Petithomme, Angels Camp
- Mr. and Mrs. Glen Landis, Sheep Ranch
- Miss Freda Cunningham, Murphys
- Mrs. Zelma Altmeyer, San Andreas
- Mr. and Mrs. H. T. Howard, San Andreas
- Mr. and Mrs. William A. Irwin, Copperopolis
- Mr. and Mrs. Larry Ayers, San Francisco
- Mr. and Mrs. Virgil A. Baker, Lodi
- Judge and Mrs. Virgil M. Airola, San Andreas
- Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Johnson, San Andreas
- Mrs. Elna Yothers, San Andreas
- University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia