

The History of The Summit

By: Bryan Clarke
Address: 23440 Sunset Drive, Los Gatos, CA, 95033
Phone Number: (408)-353-3909
School: Bellarmine College Preparatory
Teacher: Gretchen Ernster
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Introduction

Throughout the process of writing this paper, the desire to delve deeper into the history of the summit region of the Santa Cruz Mountains was always there. The area highlighted in this paper is a fascinating subject that touches on every aspect of history. While reading this paper I hope that you, the reader, can get a sense of adventure and interest. The same adventure and interest that I felt when writing this essay.

Summit road and the summit region of the Santa Cruz Mountains are full of history and local folklore. This history can be traced back to Captain John C. Fremont, who in 1846 explored the region surrounding the summit and kept a diary with meticulous accounts of his findings. Since that first documented exploration, the region has become densely populated over the course of the last 150 years. Beginning with famous frontiersmen like Mountain Charley and leading all the way up to the present day. This essay will try to delve back into the earliest days of the rugged summit area, to explore and explain the first people that settled the region, and to uncover the history of some of the first settlements there.

When Santa Clara County was formed on February 18, 1850, the area surrounding the summit of the Santa Cruz mountains was teeming with an abundance of grizzly bears and other wildlife. The terrain was extremely rugged, dense with vegetation, and rocky in some places. There were no people living in the mountains except for the local Indians. It was a land of amazing timber, of plentiful water and grass, and of mineral and forest wealth from which sprang many industries. Up until just before the county was formed, the region was unknown to any person who was not an Indian that lived in that area.

After John C. Fremont mapped out the terrain so that others could explore in his footsteps and settle in the area, there were a few brave pioneers who played the odds and headed for the hills to begin homesteading and ranching. Some that went into the mountains were successful and settled down to live there for many years, while others left the area or died as quickly as they came. They came for various reasons. Some came to hunt and make a profit selling hides, some to mine for gold or other minerals, and some to settle down and farm the land.

The first known settler to enter the region was a man by the name of Charles Henry McKiernan. Charles McKiernan, or "Mountain Charley" as the local residents of

the Santa Cruz Mountains know him, was born in Ireland in 1825. He received no formal education while he was growing up in Ireland, and while in his later youth joined up as a quartermaster in the British army, and headed for Australia and New Zealand. He was stationed there until 1848, when word came that there was gold found in California. He immediately packed his bags and began his trip to San Francisco as a seaman, since his enlistment had long since expired.

Not waiting for his pay, Mountain Charley along with every other crew member of his ship jumped the ship to join recruiters who met them at the pier with bottles of whiskey as inducements to work in the mines. The wages at that time were about \$20 a day, compared to \$20 a year wages in Ireland. With the savings he made in the mines from his first year of working there, Charles McKiernan organized a pack train to carry supplies to the Trinity mining district of northern California. On his second trip there, he was attacked by Indians and he and his company lost everything but the skin on their backs. After that, he went back to working in the mines, and eventually accumulated a second stake to move to the Santa Clara Valley.

Once he arrived there, Charles found that conflicting claims to all the land made investment quite inadvisable. So he and another friend of his named Page decided to enter the Santa Cruz Mountains early in 1850 to look for suitable land to homestead. The two of them followed an old Indian trail from what is now Los Gatos, and stopped at a small pond that the Spanish padres called *Laguna del Sargento*, which was also a long time favorite camping place for the native Indians. Page continued on towards Santa Cruz, but McKiernan found the spot to his liking and settled there completely alone. His homestead was established on the highest point of the ridge, where the southwest corner of Redwood Estates now joins Summit Road.

Near a spring Mountain Charley later built a frame house, said to have been the first such structure that existed in the entire mountain range, made from redwood

lumber whip-sawed on the spot. (The process of whip-sawing was a crude form of lumbering performed by two men that used a long, thin, flexible saw blade with handles at both ends. While one man stood in a pit under the log, another man stood on top, alternately pulling up and down on the saw to make the cut). With his home and corrals now completed, McKiernan started to raise sheep and cattle and to hunt deer for market; but grizzly bears, mountain lions, and wildcats soon decimated his sheep flock to nothing. The long horned cattle, better able to cope with the grizzlies, sold for \$6 to \$8 dollars a head.

Deer meat at that time was worth 10 cents a pound, and easily obtainable at first because the deer had never seen humans too often before, and had not known about rifles. So, they did not run when McKiernan opened fire upon them. He made two trips a week to Alviso (in those days a seaport on south San Francisco Bay) with deer meat to be shipped to San Francisco.

Mountain Charley was alone in the wilderness until 1853, when the Lyman John Burrell family settled farther down the ridge above the site where the little town of Wright's was to be located. in the same year, John Bean settled on Bean Creek near the present town of Glenwood, and Charles C. Martin settled and homesteaded land adjoining McKiernan's. He opened up a stage line and toll road on the Mountain Charley road, and later built a house for the rest of his family in the Santa Clara valley.

At the time, there were no roads west of San Jose and no fences. Up until the point that Charles and his neighbor created an ox-trail, which would later become a stage route, there was only an old Indian trail that crossed the Santa Cruz Mountains. McKiernan later built several roads, one of which still bears his name. He built a cut-off route out of Los Gatos, up through Moody Gulch near what is now Holy City, and across the later site of Redwood Estates to join up with the old Indian trail near his home on the ridge.

He tried his hand at gold mining around the region, along with many others, and even went as far as staking a claim near his home with four others. But, there was nothing that came of this venture. There has never been any paying amounts of gold found in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Charles Henry McKiernan is probably most famous for his fight with a grizzly bear. In the 1850's the grizzly bear population in the Santa Cruz Mountains was too plentiful for the ranchers. They hunted them relentlessly in order to stop predations on their livestock. They also made a profit selling the hides and meat of the bears that they killed. The grizzlies around that area were extremely large weighing from 800 to 1200 pounds, and were always treated with respect. Most hunters hunted the bears from an uphill viewpoint with a fast horse for a quick getaway if necessary. It often took several bullets to put a grizzly down for good.

On May 8, 1854, McKiernan and a friend of his named John Taylor headed out in the morning for a gulch somewhere around a mile southwest of his house, where Taylor was planning to take up some land. After they had shot a couple of deer, they spotted a mother grizzly with her two cubs. Since both men were superb marksmen, they decided to go after the bear and headed up the gulch to shoot at it from above. When they arrived at the spot they had wanted to shoot from, they found that the bear had disappeared with her cubs. They then followed a deer trail to pursue the bear, and around a bend in the trail, the bear stood up no more than 6 feet away from McKiernan and Taylor.

Mountain Charley fired instantly from nearly point blank range, while Taylor took aim and shot at the bear over McKiernan's head and into its face. Charley turned his gun around so that he could club the bear with the stock of the gun, but the bear beat the weapon out of his hands and seized McKiernan with her forepaws. The bear then bit down on his head, crushing the front of his skull, and threw him aside to start

chasing after Taylor.

Luckily, Taylor's small dog had attacked one of the cubs, and the mother bear turned the other way to chase the dog away from her cub. This gave Taylor a chance to escape to the ridge top, thinking that McKiernan had been killed instantly. The bear chased the dog away and then returned to McKiernan's body, dragging it into a clearing under an oak tree and pawing it over. After a while, the bear left and was never seen again.

With his rifle reloaded, Taylor returned to the scene of the bear mauling to find his friend sitting up against the oak tree, conscious but paralyzed from the waist down. Taylor was able to talk to Charley, and found out that he had been conscious throughout the entire ordeal. He then bound up McKiernan's head with his shirt, and leaving his loaded rifle for Charley's protection, left to go get help. The next morning at sunrise, he returned with doctor A.W. Bell from San Jose. Bell examined the wound and sent for his partner Dr. T.J. Ingersoll. When he arrived, he hammered a silver plate into McKiernan's head using two mexican pesos to make the plate, right over the spot where his skull was chewed away from over his left eye to the top of the frontal bone. The next day, Dr. Ingersoll returned to San Jose to have another plate made because the first plate was too small. By eight that evening he had returned with the new plate, and by eleven they had finished operating.

A week later, Dr. Ingersoll was forced to remove the plate again because it was irritating the wound. Throughout all of these operations, McKiernan had to endure the suffering without the use of any anesthetics. Twelve months later the wound became infected, and Dr. Ingersoll along with a Dr. Spencer removed the plate again and were forced to operate. This time they used chloroform on Charley and put him to sleep. This was the first report of any anesthetic used in an operation locally. After the doctors removed an abscess caused by a chunk of hair in the wound, McKiernan recovered

from the operation completely.

Although the wound left him terribly disfigured, Charles McKiernan enjoyed full health after the four operations. He lived to tell the tale to many mountain children up until 1890, when he fell ill to an obscure stomach ailment. Charles Henry McKiernan died on January 18, 1892, thirty eight years after the bear fight that made him a local celebrity.

When McKiernan settled in the mountains he was totally alone. However, in 1852, he was joined by a Mr. John Martin Schulteis and his wife Susan Byerly. They erected a split timber home at the current address of 22849, Summit Road, and began homesteading there. Schulteis was a German cabinetmaker by trade, so skilled at his job that he smoothed down the lumber which he used to the point where it defied the eye in comparing it with factory made cabinets. Lime mortar was used to chink up the square log walls to cement together the homemade bricks for the chimney. The lagoon that they got their water from has since dried up, but can occasionally be seen when heavy rains come to the area. It was named Schulteis Lagoon, and shows up on regional maps under this name.

In 1853, Lyman John Burrell and his family settled farther down the ridge from the McKiernan place above the site where the town of Wright's was later located. They had moved to the summit of the mountains because Burrell's wife Clarissa was ill from the journey to California from back east, and because Lyman's potato crops failed in the Santa Clara Valley. Once in the mountains, the Burrell family built a 28' x 12' foot home. The home was divided up into two rooms, a kitchen with a stove, and a sitting room with a separate fireplace. A pantry and three bedrooms were attached onto the side of the house, and all of the furniture was built by Lyman and his son Birney.

Burrell began homesteading in the mountains by raising stock and running pigs and goats. However grizzly bears and mountain lions began taking their toll on his

stock, so he had to raise long horned cattle instead which were better able to cope with the dangers. Lyman also planted fruit trees and vines which proved to be well suited for the mountain climate and soil. In 1856, he planted even more believing that he could make a living from selling the fruit. Later on, the railroad came into the mountains and Burrell was able to ship them by the new rail system to the markets for a very good profit.

In 1859, a lawsuit was brought up after Burrell and some other mountain residents of the time found that the land they had thought was the governments, was actually a part of the Soquel Augmentation Rancho. On April 13 of that same year, Burrell was able to officially buy the land from Henry W. Peck who was married to Maria Lodge, the daughter of the owner of the Soquel Augmentation Rancho, Martina Castro. Finally, the land was officially his and Lyman Burrell could go back to farming full time. Over the years he became rich from planting more fruit trees, and selling parts of his large homestead to his daughter, son, and other mountain residents. He enjoyed life up until his death on June 3, 1884.

On August 25, 1869, Lyman Burrell sold one hundred acres of his land to the Reverend James Richard Wright, for 600 dollars. Wright was born on April 14, 1814, in Tallmadge, Summit County, Ohio. After he graduated from Oberlin College, in Ohio, he married Sarah Holmes Vincent in 1844. They had met while both were students at Oberlin. Sarah was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on April 19, 1819. After they were married, James studied Greek, Latin and theology for three years at Elyria, Ohio.

Upon graduating from Elyria, he was ordained a Congregational minister. Once ordained, he and his wife moved to Sheffield, Ohio, where he taught Latin and Greek and was the minister of the local Congregational Church. The Wrights had ten children, Charles, Eli, Fredrick, Albert, Lucy, Ward, William H., Sumner, Frank V., and Clara. Because of failing health and a gut feeling that the climate in California would

be of benefit to them, the Wrights moved there in 1869 . Four years after they settled down, they built one of the first summer resorts, "Arbor Villa." Their home was situated directly across from the Burrell's, on the present day corner of Loma Prieta Avenue and Summit Road.

The people that have been mentioned thus far were only the first of many to settle throughout the summit road area of the Santa Cruz Mountains. When they arrived at where they were going, the nearest town was either Santa Cruz, or Los Gatos. During the first 20 years of people settling in the mountains there were no local towns or settlements. It was only after the Santa Cruz Mountains became known as an ideal place to homestead and log, and after many more people moved into the mountains, that towns started to be built. Most of the towns were merely a few families clumped together somewhere in the wilderness, trying to survive. As a result, many of the towns that were built eventually died out and ceased to exist.

The first town to be built in the mountains was Patchen. Patchen started out as an early stage stop on the San Jose to Santa Cruz line, which was located about a mile from the Summit on the Santa Cruz turnpike at the Mountain Charley Road fork. The government created a post office at the same spot with the same name on March 28, 1872. The first postmaster there was a man named Shirley, and so his house was the post-office. The name Patchen came from a race horse that lived in the area which had just broken a world record. Supposedly, the postal inspector asked the first person he saw what the postal stop should be named, and the man replied, "Patchen." The name stuck, and the post office operated from March 28, 1872, to November 30, 1929. Eventually a store and a few hotels were built in the area, and so people began to settle there. But, the town died out because the post-office, the main reason why the town existed in the first place, stopped operating.

Another name that is familiar in the mountains is Burrell. The village of Burrell

was named after Lyman John Burrell. In the late 1800's to early 1900's, the town was at its peak, boasting a store, run by H.D. Ingram, a blacksmith shop, built by Earl T. Smith, the Presbyterian Church, several hotels, and, after Wright's train station was abandoned, the Santa Cruz Telephone Company. However, the town no longer exists today because, like Patchen, Burrell simply died out.

Highland and Skyland were two of the other small towns that sprang up during this era. In 1867, a Mr. Dodge leased a farm from Lyman Burrell, planted a vineyard, and started a winery. As other settlers moved to the area, they named it Highland Center. During the late 1860's and early 70's, some people moved above the Highland Center area, and seeing that they looked down upon Highland, they called their area, Skyland. As time passed, the two areas became synonymous with each other, and they were merged.

There was a boom period for the region, located well up on the ridge of the Santa Cruz Mountains off of present day Soquel Road. The rich soil throughout the area allowed for vineyards and wineries to sprout up all over the place. There was also a lucrative logging industry in the area, and as a result, the Highland-Skyland area became pretty populated by the 1880's. The region became so populated, that a school district was formed. Eventually though, around the turn of the century the stripping away of the natural resources led to heavy erosion. This caused the winery business to suffer and almost stop completely. Pretty soon, besides a mild climate and an unsurpassable view, Skyland faded into history.

These three settlements that tried to beat the odds and become booming towns did so only for a short period. However this was much better than some of the other little villages, such as Austrian Gulch and Germantown, which tried to establish themselves on the map only to be completely obliterated from it a few years later. Even though the colonies and villages do not remain their names and history do, to serve as

a reminder to others on how dangerous and tough it was to live in the summit region over a century ago. The names of the pioneers that struggled to survive in the harsh wilderness that often times took the lives of their animals, and sometimes even their own, give us a glimpse of just a small portion of what it was like to live 150 years ago. They were the forefathers that laid the way clear for others to follow. I was one of those that followed because I, Bryan Clarke, currently live on Sunset Drive, just down the street from the Burrell school house, and a little ways off from Mountain Charley Road.

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