

Forgotten Trails

by

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Forgotten Trails

Introduction.

In January of 1952 my husband, myself and our three children moved to an old ranch which we had just purchased in the Santa Cruz mountains. This was to be our home for the next sixteen years. Access to our home was to the right off of highway 17 at the beginning of the Moody Gulch curve. We later learned, that before the present highway had been built, the road leading to our place had been up a winding trail from the Old Santa Cruz Highway, called Hebard Road. This road progressed through the Hebard property, and then continued up the mountainside to several other ranches that had been established in the eighteen fifties and sixties.

The house on our property was very old, and during a rain storm, which started the day we moved in, we had pots and pans all around the big, square living room catching the drips. The first clear weather found my husband up on the roof diligently scrapping moss out from under the shingles. So, it was several weeks later, on a lovely, balmy day in late February, before we had time to explore the orchard and woods of our newly aquired property. Suddenly, a young man appeared from the old road that skirted the west end of our place. Our children talked to him first, and then came running to ask us if we knew anything about the location of an old pioneer cemetery on that road. Of course we did not. But he assured us that there was one near by "the stage coach trail".

It did not take our three explorers long to find out where this was and through the next several years we made periodic visits to the cemetery.

Various tid-bits of historical information came to our attention during

the time we lived there, but it was many years after we had moved to the Motherlode area in the Sierra Nevada foothills, that I happened upon some interesting stories that took place near this location in the Santa Cruz Mountains. I was busy doing research for a local history of mining camps and towns on the Georgetown Divide , when I came across the wonderful "Memoirs of Cornelius Cole". Cole had mined on the Middle Fork of the American River for several months in 1849, and then, when the weather got rough, he and his two companions sold their claim to four English sailors who had jumped ship in San Francisco. Cole went to Sacramento, and decided that the practice of law, for which he had been trained, was more to his liking. He told of his marriage to a young lady from New York in 1853; and then - to my amazement- the following chapter of his book tells of a trip he and his bride took going by stage from San Francisco to San Jose, and then by horseback across the Mountains to Santa Cruz. This story predates the arrival of the pioneer ranchers in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and was a year previous to any planning for a connecting road across the summit. Cole's account inspired me to try and find out more about the "old stage coach trail" and the surroundings of our earlier home in California.

FORGOTTEN TRAILS

Any story of the early settlers in the Santa Cruz Mountains south of Los Gatos must start with Charles Henry McKiernan. McKiernan, who had been a quartermaster in the British Army, came to California in the spring of 1849 and went to the gold mines for a year. In 1850 he came to the Santa Cruz Mountains, and, following a trail through the still wild and unsettled Los Gatos area, made his way to a place called Laguna del Sargento where the Indians and the Spanish had camped at various times in the past. There he built his first cabin near a spring, whipsawing lumber from some of the redwood trees which covered the mountains. To protect his livestock, he soon found that he had to fight off mountain lions, coyotes, eagles, and grizzly bears. For two years he was the only settler in that area, and he became well known on both sides of the mountain, as "Mountain Charley". [1]

One of his acquaintances in Santa Cruz was Eliza Farnham, who had also come to California in 1849. Mrs. Farnham was no ordinary woman; besides being a writer and lecturer, before she came to California, she had been matron of the State Prison at Sing Sing, where she had initiated a system of humane treatment for the prisoners.[2] Mountain Charley possibly told her about the trails he had made over the mountain leading to the Santa Clara valley.

One day, hitching her horse to a sulky, a two wheeled vehicle with only a seat for the driver, Mrs. Farnham made the trip alone to Mountain Charley's ranch and then down the other side to the Santa Clara valley.

Later, in 1854 , the Santa Clara Board of Supervisors sent Sheriff James Murphy on an exploratory trip to plot a route for a public road from Los Gatos to the summit. Murphy, following a crude, steep road that Zachariah "Buffalo" Jones, an early entrepreneur in that area, had built for lumber wagons, ended up at Mountain Charley's ranch. There Murphy heard the story of Eliza Farnham's trip over the summit, and named the Santa Cruz gap after this intrepid woman, calling it "Farnham Pass".[3]

Mrs. Farnham was also a friend of Cornelius Cole, the miner, turned lawyer, who in 1853 was practicing law in Sacramento., and would, a few years later, become a United States Senator from California. Cole had in January of that year married Olive Colegrove, a young woman from Trumansburg, New York. Sometime that summer, Mrs. Farnham and a friend Georgia Bruce, had invited the young couple to visit them in Santa Cruz. [4]

Cole and his bride went by boat from Sacramento to San Francisco; then boarded a stagecoach for San Jose, where they arrived around the middle of the afternoon. They soon found a stable and rented two good horses and hired a guide, who would accompany them and then bring the horses back the following day. They were advised to stay over night and start their trip the following morning, but being eager to reach their destination that night , and - looking across the few miles toward the range they would cross - which did not appear particularly formidable to them, they confidently proceeded on their way.

The three riders skimmed over the floor of the valley, but, by the time they reached the base of the mountains, the sun had disappeared. There was no settlement anywhere near so the Coles decided to "plunge into the dark mountain forest before us", rather than return to San Jose, "as the latter was not to be thought of by persons of our temperament".

They soon were following a "tortuous bridle path up the gradual mountain slope, through a dense growth of overhanging trees". After a time the moonlight, filtering through the dense foilage, partially lighted the way; but the riders were dependent upon the sure-footed horses to pick their way up the trail. After climbing for more than an hour, the lead horse suddenly reared and tried to turn back. Looking ahead into the gloom, the guide discovered a grizzly bear in their path. "Without hesitation the three of us withdrew far enough to hold a council of war." It was decided that Olive Cole would hold the horses while the two men proceeded along the path "with lighted torches hastily prepared". The grizzly slowly retreated and finally lumbered off into the woods, and with the light of the torches, Mrs. Cole brought up the horses. It was with some misgivings, and a great deal of caution, that the party proceeded on their way. About midnight they arrived at the summit and soon after at Mountain Charley's cabin. There, they remained until morning. Cole said "Charley had been living at this highest point in the Santa Cruz Mountains for years". [Actually Charley had been there for two years at this time.] No doubt, serious conversation about the population of grizzly bears in the mountains took place, as the Coles were made aware of the terrible time that Charley had in trying to keep domestic animals and his on-going war against the marauders .[4]

Cole goes on to tell about Mountain Charley's narrow escape from death a few years after their visit. Charley was attacked by a large grizzly and terribly mauled. A hunting companion took him to Santa Cruz [1], where a Doctor made a plate from two Mexican silver coins to trepane the hole in his skull. McKiernan also lost an eye and was so badly disfigured that his friends could barely recognize him. Eliza Farnham and Georgia Bruce ,

proved their friendship by helping care for their injured friend.[4] Mrs. Farnham left California in 1856, so the accident took place within three years after the Coles' visit.[2] Charley's bear hunting days were over, but he lived for many more years and contributed considerably to the development of the future roads over the mountains.

To try to ascertain if the old road leading up the west side of our property could have been an early stage coach trail, I have searched for descriptions of the roads over the Santa Cruz Mountains during the 1850's. During the next decade, after the Coles' trip on what was obviously only a horse trail through the forest, there seem to have been several routes established over the mountains: the Santa Clara Turnpike, 1854,[1] a route that followed one of Mountain Charley's trails; the Santa Cruz and San Jose stage line, via San Juan, was established in 1854, (this was the route that had the famous driver, "Cock-eyed Charley" Parkhurst, who turned out to be a woman.)([1]; the Santa Cruz Turnpike, 1858-1859, organized in Los Gatos, a toll road to run from Forbes's Mill to Santa Cruz[3]; another route called the "Old San Jose Road", along which the site of the Patchen post office had been located at various spots through the years, was built in 1858.[1] During this same time, logging roads were being scraped out wherever they were needed. The competition to establish lucrative toll roads was fierce.

The Mountain Charley trail, that became the Santa Clara Turnpike, seems to be recorded as the first stage road and was described as follows, "this stage road curves to the west above Alma, climbs to the summit and after passing McKiernen's log house ...curves down again..."[1] Going west of Alma would keep any road to the west of Moody Gulch, and then follow the summit a short distance southeasterly before turning south to

McKiernans. Although this is a rather meager description, our old road would fit , as it goes west of Moody Gulch and the present Highway 17, following the most easily passable terrain. Any trail closer to Moody Gulch would seem unlikely because of the deep ravines.

Mountain Charley was the owner of another stageline, "put through in 1857".[1] This line was sold in 1874 to George Colgrove," well-known" for his yellow Concord coach. The description of this route, well delineated on the Santa Cruz side, continues " ...After leaving this station (Scott's Valley) the road led up to Mountain Charley's station on the Mountain Charley road at the summit and thence over the county line and down to San Jose". Since the line belonged to McKiernan, he may have been using the same roadway that was established in 1854 , but again there is no conclusive evidence, as no landmarks are mentioned.

During the years that we lived in the Santa Cruz Mountains my daughters and I tried to follow the old trail where it led through the neighboring ranch toward the summit. This property was originally settled by people named Biddle; but in more recent history was known as the " Steinbeck ranch". John Steinbeck, and his first wife Carol, bought the property in 1938, and "camped " in the old Biddle farmhouse while a new home was being built for them .[5] Steinbeck's play "Of Mice and Men" had had a very successful run on Broadway in New York, and the new home reflected some of this new affluence. After they moved to the ranch, Steinbeck was involved in putting the finishing touches on his novel "Grapes of wrath".

The continuation of our old road over this property had been abandoned long ago, but it was still possible for us to trace it through the ferns and redwoods by the moss covered embankments that had been cut when the

road was graded for the vehicles of earlier times. We were never quite able to follow the road all the way to the top, as the trail became lost, in a heavy growth of chaparral, some distance from the summit.

The road, going down the mountainside from our place to the Hebard property and the Santa Cruz highway, had been used regularly until the new Highway 17 was put through in the 1940's , so, was fairly passable. The old pioneer cemetery was located between a fork in this road , the lower branch going past the graveyard, and then through a mysterious old redwood canyon with remnants of small rotting wooden bridges crossing the deep ravines that cut down the hill.

Part of the cemetery had been buried by a large landslide in the earthquake of 1906, so there is no record of many of the graves. [6] One of my daughters made a detailed drawing of the burial place in the 1950's. One of the graves was that of Eliza Dull whose name was on our property deed. Another was that of a young man; his marble monument was built to resemble a bed. The most ornate marker was of a young woman, named Jemina Evans, who had died in childbirth in 1862. A poignant verse was carved on the stone:

My dear companion, you I leave
Tho' long and sorely you may grieve,
This grave contains your blooming bride.
And our sweet babe lies by my side.

In the spring of 1975, there were several articles in the *San Jose Mercury* about a grave that had been vandalized in the Santa Cruz mountains.[7] A friend of mine, who had made the trek down our road to

the old burial place with me when we lived there, and remembered it well because of the severe case of poison oak she had, sent me clippings of the stories from the *Mercury*. The grave that had been dug up was that of the nineteen year old girl, Jemina Evans, wife of Eli Hugh Evans, and their baby.

Evans had been a cook for an eighty member wagon train in 1849, that had taken the southern route to Santa Fe and then on to San Diego. He then went north to mine on the Yuba River; he was next hauling logs in the mountains west of Redwood City; then, from 1853 to 1857, he was running a grist mill in San Jose. In 1857 he was one of a group of men who formed a company to contract to build part of the Santa Cruz turnpike. The following year Evans "purchased eighty acres beside the road". [7] In 1861, when he would have been thirty-six years old, Evans married nineteen year old Jemina Ann Ricketts, who died November 18, 1862. She was buried "in the cemetery of his neighbor, Lewis Hebard".

Hebard had come with his family to California in 1850. He tried his luck in the mines at various places along the "Mother Lode" for the next two years, and then, in 1852, Hebard came to San Jose where he worked as a carpenter for five years. He was a charter member of the Hook and Ladder Company organized there in 1853. In 1857 he went to the Santa Cruz mountains and preempted 160 acres of land. There he carved a home out of the wilderness for his four children and his wife, Lucinda, whom he had married in Wisconsin in 1849.[6] The cemetery was established as a family burial place, when Hebard's wife and three of his children died in a flu epidemic in the early 1860's. [6] It was soon used by his neighbors as well, and burials were made there for several decades. Hebard's fourth child, a son, was killed sometime later when he climbed through a fence

and his gun went off. Several years later Hebard married a widow who had one son, Charles W.C. Murdock; another son, Francis E., was born to the Hebards.

Lewis Hebard had many stories to tell his son and step-son. Some of the stories were about his early acquaintance with Zachariah "Bufflo" Jones. Jones had shown Hebard where Captain John C. Fremont had camped in 1846. The grassy, open spot was near the Hebard property, and one day either Hebard or the young Murdock found the remains of an old army saddle and a rusty cavalry spur that could have been left by the Fremont party. [The spur is still in possession of the family.] [6]

The Hebard's, in the early days, often accommodated travelers who were on their way to Santa Cruz. [6] This is another strong indication that this was the early Mountain Charley trail which became the first stage road, the Santa Clara Turnpike of 1854.

Since the Santa Cruz Turnpike (1857-58) was built on the east side of Moody Gulch, it would seem that Evans's property was possibly south and east of Hebard's. An oil well, being drilled by the Shaw and Weldon Petroleum Company a few years later, was on the Evans's land near Moody Gulch. [3] It would have been a rugged trip to the neighbors cemetery. No doubt anyone on that side of the mountain was considered a neighbor, and any other cemetery at that time, would have been many miles away.

In retrospect, we realize that we lived in the mountain area south of Los Gatos in a transition time between the early day developement, and the dividing up of the ranches, where many large, beautiful homes have been built in the last twenty years. It was a time of limbo. Only a few traces were left of the life and activities that had transpired there in the earlier

years. The lumbering industry had long been a thing of the past. Only a few huge old stumps remained here and there covered with vines and moss. The redwoods in the canyons, even though drastically cut over in the lumbering years, had grown back into towering trees.

Fruit orchards, that had been established in the clearings on the ridges by the early pioneers, had declined years before. I was told that the depression years finished the mountain orchards. A few acres of neglected prunes and apples still remained on our place, remnants of the many acres, that a predecessor of ours, a man named Logan, had sold fruit from for many years. We found the stencil for his fruit boxes buried under several inches of earth. Alexander Logan and his family had come from Lexington, Missouri in 1852. He had pioneered there after leaving Lexington Kentucky, where he was born. After trying to ranch at the Willows in California for a few years, he sold out and came to the Santa Cruz Mountains.[8] He was Treasurer of the Santa Cruz Turnpike Joint Stock Company that organized in 1858, [3], and was credited with suggesting the name " Lexington " for the community that was forming at Jones' Mill. Two of his sons owned 200 acres of land in this same area. [8]

The railroad, that had been built in the valley below us in the 1870's , was only a memory. If you knew where to look for them, the entrances to the tunnels, that had taken a few thousand Chinese to build, were still there.

The Moody Gulch oil wells were almost legend. The big excitement had been in the 1860's, when oil was found floating upon springs in the area, and gradually some drilling led to several wells that proved to be productive. David Moody had come with his parents across the plains in 1849, and was thirteen years old when his family arrived in San Jose in

the following year joined the flour milling business with his brothers. He became very prominent in community and political life, and was called upon to act as Santa Clara County Treasurer in 1867, after the previous Treasurer had left town with \$23,000 of the county funds. Moody owned a large acreage of land in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and a one-third interest in the oil wells being developed there in the "Moody District". This was under lease to the Pacific Coast Oil Company. The oil was piped to Alma and then shipped to Alameda. The oil found here was considered to be very high quality. [8] There were other companies and investors that kept things going, and at various periods through the years the excitement would start again. At the time Highway 17 was built, there were still several old derricks in the Gulch.[1],[3]. There were test holes being drilled at Holy City in 1951 -52, that were capped and called "no dope holes", indicating that whatever they had found was secret information. However, when we bought our property in 1952, a company still held options to drill there.

At the time we arrived in the area, the large earth-filled Lexington dam was being built. There was much discussion and controversy as to whether this type of dam would be safe, because of its proximity to the San Andreas fault. We were among the many sightseers during the construction and discovered that a few of the old buildings still stood at the Lexington site.

Lexington had first been called "Jones Mill", named by the Zachariah "Bufflo" Jones who controlled much of the land and roads in the area in the early lumbering days. He had bought the land from Branham and Hanks who had started a sawmill there in 1848.[1] In 1860, John P. Hennings, bought some of the Jones property, and it was at then that the settlement was renamed Lexington. In a few years there were many sawmills nearby, and

related industries flourished.[3] The Pioneer Stage Line, run by Ward and Colegrove, left the New York Exchange in San Jose at 10:15 in the morning after the train from San Francisco had arrived. The stage stopped at "The Lexington House" at noon, where Mrs. Paddock had dinner ready for the hungry travellers. [1] There was a post office there after 1861.

A mile south of Lexington another community was starting. This was first known as "Forest House" and was built as stage station and hostelry by Lysander Collins. Collins had arrived in Santa Clara County from Pennsylvania, where he had been a raftsman on the Susquehanna. He worked for a nearby lumbering operation owned by James Howe the summer of 1862, and accepted much of his wages in lumber. He obtained land on the old stage road by squatters rights and built his house beside a creek he named Collins Creek. Collins, realizing that his hold on the land was precarious, bought two 160 acre tracts of land from Howe and Howes' son-in-law, William Weldon, which they held under school land warrants. The roadhouse was a very imposing structure, with a saloon, dining room, kitchen and bedrooms on the ground floor, and four bedrooms on the second floor. Unfortunately, a winter storm in 1865 flooded the creek, and water swept through the Forest House. Collins and his family moved to a house on a nearby knoll that had been built by Howe. [9]

Soon, a Frenchman named Froment, built a two mile tramway to run logs from the Logan -Whitehurst Gulch to a mill just north of Collins creek. After two years Froment vacated, but the property was "jumped" when a Santa Cruz real estate operator, named Younger, sold it to a Mr. White. Collins now went to court to try and prove his claim to the land, but White and Younger went right ahead and built a new and larger Forest House. At the time it was the largest hostelry between Los Gatos and

Santa Cruz. Three years later Congress agreed that anyone who had settled in good faith under school warrants, could take up Homestead or Preemption rights, and Collins got the new, improved Forest House back. Lewis Hebard was hired to build a school house near by, and this school was used for many years by children who came from near and far. In 1873 the post office was moved from Lexington to this area and at that time "Forest House" changed to "Alma".[9]

After the South Pacific Railroad was built in 1876, Alma flourished, and Lexington began to decline. Most of the buildings were still standing at Alma at the time the dam was being built in 1952. A larger schoolhouse had replaced the early one-room affair. An Indian - Pioneer Pageant, in which all the children of the school took part, was the last thing held there before the final closing of the school. For eighteen years, since 1934, the Alma fire station had been located on the beautiful site where Forest House had been. [9] The school and fire station were reestablished on the east side of Highway 17.

The ground was cleared of the remaining buildings, and the dam completed. There was much joking the following winter when only a small puddle of water was collected in the reservoir. Some pessimistic observers predicted it would never be filled. Then the winter of 1954 and 1955 brought a deluge of rain, and water was soon cascading over the spillway.

Alma College had been purchased by the Jesuits from Dr. Harry Tevis in 1934 and this site was still remembered in the 1950's, by the old timers, as the Tevis estate. But there had been several interesting owners before Tevis bought the property in 1906.[1] James Howe had erected a mill there in the 1850's. He had dammed a ravine, and piped water to it from Webb

in the 1850's. He had dammed a ravine , and piped water to it from Webb creek. This formed a lagoon where he was able to operate an overshot water wheel which operated a "up and down muley saw". [9] In the 1880's the property had been purchased and was being developed by Captain Stillman Knowles. Knowles had been a San Francisco vigilante in 1856. He sold to James L. Flood, son of bonanza king James C. Flood.[1] Then in 1906 this became the Tevis property. The land had been developed into a place of great beauty. Our first visitor, the young man looking for the old graveyard, was a scholar at the Jesuit college. The property included a large vineyard, which was below us to the west. Looking across this intervening land we had a distant view of the Montezuma School for Boys, located off of Bear Creek Road. This school first held classes in 1911, and it's founder, Professor Ernest A. Rogers, was responsible for developing a unique curriculum. The flames from a disastrous fire at the school in 1953, were quite spectacular from our vantage point. This school was closed in 1955. Alma College became a thing of the past when their college was moved to Berkeley in 1967.[3]

One of our neighbors had started raising herbs for the "Spice Island Company" in the 1940's, and an adjacent ranch had a few acres of thyme and rosemary that were still being harvested . This became a thing of the past when labor became too costly in the later part of the 1960's.

Our children could roam and explore the mountain side in any direction . One of the closest attractions was a small wrought iron gate, covered with vines that was just across the old road at the back of our property. This led to a tiny amphitheater circled with redwood trees. Here there was a nymph-like bronze figure forever gazing into the depths of a mirror-like pool. This had been used several years before by the owners,

Orchestra as guests to their mountain home. Minetti was a member of the orchestra, and invited his friends to come and make music in this lovely, secluded spot. Mrs Minetti had been responsible for starting the herb business.

Our girls made bark lean-to huts down in the canyon where a large redwood tree had fallen years before. They found the "Iron Spring". Our son built a lookout about forty feet up in the branches of a redwood tree. He had coaxed his sisters to tie boards on a rope, which he then hoisted up through the branches. We worked to bring the orchard back into production for a few years more. I dug old bottles out of the dump in the woods which was covered with a mulch of leaves and wood-rats nests. We planted more trees to enhance the already wonderful varieties there.

What matter if the roof sometimes still leaked, and that some wild honey bees decided to make their home in the south wall of our daughters room? Looking back we realize this was an idyllic time and place to live. I am happy that trying to follow the story of "the old stage trail" has led me to find out a little more of the history of our wonderful location in the Santa Cruz mountains.