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1993

Honorable Mention

Austen Warburton, Parliamentarian
Essay Contest Chairman
California Pioneers of Santa Clara County

April 15, 1993

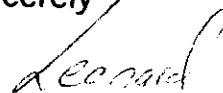
Dear Austen:

Please accept this manuscript for entry in the annual Pioneer Essay Contest.

In 1983 I was asked by the Mt. Charlie Chapter of E. Clampus Vitus to get some biographical data about Clyde Arbuckle prepared as they were going to dedicate a plaque at the San Jose Airport to the introduction of the honey bee to California and to Clyde A. At that time I found that there was almost nothing recorded about his amazing life and I prepared a short biography. I worked closely with him all during the three years that went into the production of his History of San Jose, and would glean bits of intriguing personal history. So when his ninetieth anniversary approached I decided the time had come to write a more extensive biography. I spent five mornings interviewing him during the month of February, and some of the interviews included Helen and Jim in attendance. I believe he told me stories and facts about his life that had never been recorded. I felt that the work was good enough to be printed and my wife Harriet did considerable editing. This was done before either of the newspaper articles were written, and I consider each of those articles to be a valuable addition to our history.

Once the manuscript was completed, I got competitive bids from three printing companies, Spartan Printing, Rosicrucian Press and Prospect Press, all of San Jose. Rosicrucian Press submitted the low bid \$1386.00 for 1000 copies. The Argonauts Arbuckle Party Committee have purchased about 225 copies at \$1.50 each and each member at the party received a copy. This really has nothing to do with the quality of the manuscript regarding the contest. I just wanted you to know that should a monetary prize be awarded for it, the money would be used to finance this printing or some other historical work.

Sincerely



CLYDE ARBUCKLE INTERVIEW, FEB. 1993

Clyde Arbuckle is NOT a man of few words! This was the lead-in that two different writers used, attempting personal interviews with him. This nonagenarian is a master of colorful language and phrases in his writing and lectures as San Jose's City Historian.

In these days of disposable everything, here is a man who moved into his house on Franquette street in 1939. In order to save money during its construction, he used a shovel to dig out his basement and the foundation for his garage. He still lives with his SAME wife of 60 years in the SAME house, and still uses the SAME shovel to spade his vegetable garden.

He is a descendant of early California pioneer families who arrived two years before gold was discovered. The Gordons and the Pyles settled in the Santa Clara Valley, but Clyde describes his father as a "johnny-come-lately," only arriving in 1886. Both his mother and father had had previous mates before they married and lost their spouses to death. Clyde was the youngest of the tribe, having only one full brother but six half-brothers and -sisters on the Arbuckle side, and eight on the Gordon side. He was born on April 11, 1903, and he quotes the weather forecast of that day as "fair and windy," a prophetic trait for this historian.

The Arbuckle home was then in Santa Clara and his father owned the Santa Clara Hotel. Thirty feet from his room was a cow corral and thirty feet in the other direction was the outhouse where it was "mighty cold in the winter." Their neighbors were Portugese and Spanish families for whom Clyde developed the highest admiration. The year was 1906 when he remembers his bed taking a ride across the room amid violent shaking during the great earthquake of that year.

His early schooling was at the Santa Clara Grammar School and, after classes, on weekends, and during the summer he supplemented the meager family income with odd jobs. At age 15 he left school to become a printer's devil, full-time laborer during the summer, after school hours and Saturdays on the loading dock of Block Fruit Company and, down at the Santa Clara Southern Pacific train station, worked for the American Railway Express company. Here he received

his first driving lesson, a once-around-the-block, driving a Moreland distillate-burning truck. The successful completion of the truck driving lesson assured him of a three-week job in December, 1918. As a fifteen-year-old, he wore a breathing mask hauling caskets and many a corpse in a metal shipping box during the great flu epidemic that year.

His bicycle racing career had begun a year earlier when he was 14, and that led to his first permanent, full-time job. An old-time bike racer, Tom Morgan, recognized Clyde walking down First Street and motioned him into his office. Morgan was the Railway Express manager and asked him what he was doing. The manager had caught three of his drivers shooting craps and fired them on the spot. "What are you doing Clyde?" and, with a "Nothing" answer, asked him three questions: "Do you know how to write a receipt, can you drive a team of horses, and do you know the town?" The answers were "yes," and he reported for duty at the San Jose S. P. depot. It was a temporary job until he gained enough seniority to make the permanent list in 1922. This job kept him employed until 1947.

He started driving a team of horses, Jack and Jill (Jill was a "toe dancer," a horse that would walk on the front of her feet), graduated to Moreland and Model T trucks, and he became acquainted with every business, business owner, and most of the homeowners in San Jose. With his fabulous memory he can still recall the people and locations of these early years. During a recent visit with the William Powells (Powell's Bookstore), these old friends started naming everyone on First Street from the 1920s, '30s, '40s, and '50s. Long forgotten store names like Prussia's, Appleton's, J. S. Williams, Harts, Hales, San Jose Creamery and O'Briens, were identified and recounted.

While working for the Railway Express Company, Clyde continued his education by going to night school both in San Jose and in San Francisco, where he attended the California Fine Arts School. He travelled by train on a railway express pass to attend evening classes. Murphy Sabatino remembers him as always reading when walking down the street, never looking up from the book in his hand and never missing a curb or hitting an obstacle. Soon he started his writing career by free-lancing articles for the Pony Express magazine.

Arbuckle was to become a famous bicycle racer. His first road

ce was from San Jose to Gilroy and was uneventful except that he developed TB (tired bottom). But with better equipment and better training he soon became a champion. Like other bike riders of the day, his training consisted of riding an early morning newspaper route. He started by 4:30 a.m. and he delivered papers on a twenty mile route in South San Jose.

In 1921 when he was 18, racing in Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Times newspaper headlined "Arbuckle Cops Mile Bike Title." Another article stated "Arbuckle Grabs The Bike Crown, Wins State Title In Three Straight Heats." The article goes on: "Two Champs, Clyde is the brother of Fatty Arbuckle, which puts two champions in the family, whereas there was a time when the name Arbuckle stood only for a package of medium-priced coffee, and not sinkers".

On April 3, 1921, racing under the colors of the Garden City Wheelmen, he broke the USA road record for 60 miles by racing to Gilroy and return in two hours and 45 minutes. This was before the days of geared bikes. His last race was on Admission Day of 1926 at the California State Fairgrounds in an Australian Pursuit race of 60 minutes. This was one hour's solid riding and he quit a winner. Arbuckle and the other Garden City Wheelmen made San Jose famous.

Perhaps clean living accounted for his long life, athletic prowess and excellent memory for he never smoked cigarettes, gave up cigars when he was five (his admission), but tried them again when he was 45. The smoke got in the way of his writing so they had to go. He has been known to enjoy a wee nip of single malt Scotch whiskey, but never to excess. Always faithful to his wife of 50 years, he has been noted to enjoy the sight of a lovely "female type woman." One of his many colorful favorite phrases is "that dress fits her tighter than the skin on a Portuguese sausage."

The first time he spotted his future wife was seeing Helen Fisher doing her San Jose High School homework at a friend's home in 1926. He remembers her as "a little butterball." According to Helen, she wasn't even aware of him! Later he summoned his courage and took her on a hike over the hills of New Almaden. This was to become a major pastime for their future family. Five years later they were going together, and they were married on August 7, 1932. Leaving for their honeymoon on the Del Monte Express train, his fellow workers showered the newlyweds with corn and wheat otherwise used to feed animals on the shipping dock. Their wedding was delayed a week as Clyde's mother died on the date originally set. His

mother's hospital bills burdened the newly-married couple, but Clyde accepted the responsibility to pay them as several of her children were long dead.

Three years later son Jim was born, followed the next year by daughter Susan. Times were tough in the great depression and the major form of recreation for the hiking family was exploring the local hills and venturing over to the Sierra, for it "cost nothing." By hard work at the express company, free-lance writing, and pioneer thrift, they were able to buy their first home on Franquette Street in 1939. In order to save on building costs, Clyde bought a shovel and hand dug the basement of the house and the foundation trench of the garage. A brother-in-law brought a wheel and Clyde built a wheelbarrow used to haul out the dirt. Fifty-four years later, they still live in the white painted home, packed chuck-a-block with books, paintings of California scenes, one or more cats, and hundreds of manila envelopes packed with research materials.

Much of their time is spent in the kitchen near their original Wedgewood gas stove with trash burner. The trash burner is fed with wood hand cut by Clyde. Helen is a fine cook, excellent baker, knowledgable gardener, and writer in her own right. Jim has come to live with them and he specializes in gourmet cooking. Susan and Jim both graduated from Cal Berkeley and hold advanced degrees. Susan lives and works in Ontario, Canada.

On a recent visit Clyde pulled out his old banjo case, blew off the dust and opened it. He showed me the 1926 Union Musician's directory that was lying next to the four-string plectrum banjo and there was his name. Harry, his half-brother, was a self-taught guitar player, and he showed Clyde basic fingering and chords. Harry would play after supper frequently, but finally left the family home to live in Fresno. Clyde considered it only a short bike ride of 180 miles to visit Harry for more instruction. Back in Santa Clara, some Portuguese men would get together at the town's barber shop on Saturday night and play their guitars. Clyde would go to listen and learn. He started to play with John Lippert but became more interested in the banjo, the popular instrument of the twenties. Not able to read music, he took lessons from Harry George and was soon playing professionally in a three-piece combo. But the banjo lost popularity in 1934 and, because of family responsibilities he gave up the music business.

He is a man of many names. The Portuguese youngsters called him "Cy" as they had difficulty pronouncing Clyde, the Gordon members of his family called him "Buckle," to co-workers at the express company he was "Bucky," a Los Angeles newspaper called him "Kid Arbuckle" and, in recent years, his students addressed him as "Mr. A." But his birth certificate name is William Clyde Arbuckle. This name led to family confusion. His father was William Goodrich Arbuckle; his half-brother, William Harrison Arbuckle. So he dropped the William and everyone knows him as Clyde.

In 1929 he joined the Masonic Lodge, Liberty #299, in Santa Clara where he is still a member and, in 1930, became a member of the Scottish Rite Bodies of San Jose. He was soon a member of their history committee and was commissioned to write a digest of the history of the Lodge. Leon Whitsell had seen his articles in the Pony Express magazine and liked what he saw. Clyde was the major contributor and editor for the Centennial History of the Masonic Lodges for the State of California in 1950. He contributed the chapter that dealt with San Jose in the 1962 publication "California's First Century of Scottish Rite Masonry."

In 1945 he became San Jose's first and only official City Historian. Later that same year, the Historic Landmarks Commission was formed, and he became the official secretary of the Commission until 1970. As official historian, he became the director of the San Jose Historical Museum at the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds. The Museum was housed in a replica of the First California State Legislature. This was a civic project built in 1949 to commemorate 100 years of Statehood. It was built on the Plaza on Market Street with donated labor and materials, and moved to the Fairgrounds in 1950.

As director and curator he became an independent contractor for the City. In 1970, under Theron Fox's urging, he was commissioned to write the definitive history of the city. This 535-page book was published in 1985 and appeared in two versions, a deluxe hardbound edition and a splendid moroccan-leather-bound gilt and hand-painted fore-edge limited edition. A recent resale of one of the latter brought \$700.

Clyde wrote two other books, "Historic Names of Persons and Places in Santa Clara County," written with Roscoe D. Wyatt in 1948, and "Santa Clara County Ranchos" in 1968. The Historic Names book was published by the San Jose Chamber of Commerce and the

California Pioneers of Santa Clara County. Theron Fox was the instigator and publisher of the Ranchos book and brought Ralph Rambo to do the cartography and illustrations while Clyde did the important research and writing. This is a most successful book that has been reproduced in softbound version in many successive printings. The original hardbound edition was limited to 300 copies, and was immediately sold out. Resale prices soared to over \$100. The book cataloged all of the Spanish and Mexican grants in the valley, listing locations, original grantees, and later owners.

Many of his articles appeared in the Western history magazines "Westways" and "The Argonaut." He worked closely with Pat Loomis and Dan Stern of the San Jose Mercury to produce the commemorative issues in 1951 and 1961. From 1970 to 1973 he wrote a weekly feature for the Sunday section of the Mercury entitled "Nostalgia." This featured pictures and descriptions of historical individuals, places, and buildings.

If a historical group offered him membership and he accepted, he would always play a prominent role. In 1947 he was invited to become a member of the "Ancient and Honorable Order of E. Clampus Vitus, Yerba Buena Chapter." He became the "Humbug" (president) in 1959.

He has been on the Board of Directors of the California Pioneers of Santa Clara Valley since 1944; he was a founder of The Conference of California Historical Societies and its third president in 1959.

An early friend was Dr. Earl Rhoads. The Rhoads family and Clyde's family (Gordons) had been travelling in same covered wagon caravan across the plains that avoided the disaster that befell the Donner party that same year. Another San Josean, Professor Peter Weddell became interested in the tragedy of the Donner Party. In 1921 Weddell met the author McGlashan, who had written the "History of the Donner Party" in 1879. He discovered that the Donner trail and campsites had never been properly marked. Weddell began marking the trail with redwood signs. About twenty-five years later Arbuckle and Rhoads joined the effort and helped replace signs that had been vandalized or disappeared. This afforded him intimate knowledge of the trail and the tragedy.

Clyde and Earl travelled extensively in Rhoad's Plymouth car, bumping on long forgotten tracks and relearning the lore of the

pioneers. The year 1967 found Clyde and Helen driving to Missouri, retracing the Oregon/California trail, and the next year Arbuckle and Rhoads repeated the trip, adding to their knowledge.

In 1970 Clyde led a Greyhound busload of Argonaut adult education class members over the same route. The coordinator for the trip was Mary (Little) Mueller and the bus driver was George Cook. This team of Arbuckle, Little, and Cook conducted more than a hundred Argonaut trips to historical sites all over the West during the score of years they worked together. A repeat Metropolitan Adult Education trip of the Oregon Trail in 1977 furnished journalist Pat Loomis with material for fifteen feature articles that were published by the San Jose Mercury News.

The Argonauts were an outgrowth of a group that called themselves the Vagabonds. Organized in 1934 by Dr. David MacKaye they first travelled by private cars in caravans, and later travelled by bus. MacKaye assembled more than 3600 color slides, many of which Clyde later showed in his classes.

In 1949 MacKaye, Director of Adult Education, approached Clyde to conduct the evening classes. His first classes were taught at the San Jose High School buildings on the Washington Square campus and were an immediate and tremendous success. At one time he was teaching five classes a week--three night classes and two morning classes--featuring the Overland Trail, Santa Clara County history and California history. Some classes were so crowded that additional chairs were brought to the classrooms.

It was necessary for Arbuckle to complete college educational courses at San Jose State College, and in 1958 he was awarded an Honorary Master of Letters by the College.

The success of his class necessitated a move to larger quarters and the new home was the Edwin Markham Junior High School auditorium on Cottle Avenue. In 1962 Mary (Little) Mueller became the administrator for the Adult Education program. Clyde says that "The first time I saw her she was a picture of sartorial perfection, was efficiency personified, and she was the best boss I'd ever had." This arrangement continued for 27 years until Mary retired in 1987. Clyde retired the next year after teaching for 39 years!

As a tribute to Arbuckle, a grammar school on the east side of San Jose was dedicated in 1962 and was named the Clyde Arbuckle Elementary School. In a recent story in the grammar school paper "The Dragon News," the following appeared: "The school was named

after Mr. Clyde Arbuckle but he didn't know why. Mr Arbuckle came on Monday, February 1 to see the news (sic) kids. After he found out that they named a school after him, he said, he had to 'behave himself'....."Mr. Arbuckle was married for 61 years. Sixty-one years is a long time to be married."

In May 1972, The San Jose Newspaper Guild awarded him its traditional "Gold Plated Typestick" as the city's outstanding citizen of 1972.

In August, 1986, during the Oregon-California Trails Association (OCTA) convention in Carson City, Clyde was presented with a meritorious achievement award in recognition of his career in teaching trail history and leading countless tours of the Oregon and California trails for his students.

Perhaps Clyde's greatest accomplishments can be summed up by the careful research in his books and by the interest he has engendered in his students and associates to carry on his love of California and its history!

LEONARD MC KAY
February 1993