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ELIZABETH MARY

a paper submitted to
California Pioneers of Santa Clara County

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PREFACE

When Roberta Keyes de Zaldo realized that she had no one to pass her family archives to, she began to dispose of papers and photographs.

The image of a person in such a situation provokes sympathy. The image of the lost historical evidence is appalling to subsequent researchers.

Each piece of physical evidence remaining from the past embellishes and explains the clerical records the researcher finds, gives meaning to statistics, and concrete foundation to the imagined lives of our forbearers.

Today's searchers are astounded that first generation American Californians could be unaware of the dignity, excitement and romance of their parents lives, and the fascination those lives hold for subsequent generations.

This paper tries to reconstruct the life of Roberta Keyes de Zaldo's mother, Elizabeth Mary Roberts Keyes, an original member of the Santa Clara County Pioneer Association.

ELIZABETH MARY

Elizabeth Mary was born in Faversham, Kent, England, on July 11, 1819 and died on February 20, 1902 in San Jose, California. During those 83 years she lived a life that seems to the later researcher adventurous, poignant, and often tragic.

The facts of her early life are sparse. We do not know her family name. The information we do have about her early life is in the California State Library Pioneer Letters. It consists of a brief statement submitted by her niece Patty Reed Lewis that says she immigrated to Australia at an early age. Elizabeth married in Australia, a clergyman, John Archibald Roberts, who left there for California. She accompanied Mr. Roberts and their child was born at sea in 1849, so that by the time Elizabeth was 30 years old she had changed continents twice, married, and had had a child born at sea. Those few things we do know about her life indicate that she was a person of her time -- a time when many people were willing to change and move.

The impetus for the couples immigration is unknown. Perhaps the gold rush drew them. Perhaps they traveled for Mr. Roberts health. Whatever the reason, John Archibald Roberts died in San Francisco in the fall of 1849 leaving Elizabeth Mary and little Archy in a tumultuous foreign city. It has been described by William Perkins

In 1849, San Francisco presented a strange aspect. The old town was composed of some scores of poor adobe huts, with four or five houses of a better class. The plaza or square (Portsmouth Square), situated at that time within a hundred yards of high water, had on its upper side two old-fashioned buildings, the principle ones in the town... But these were features completely thrown into the shade by what we may call the New town which, not as yet offering any buildings as solid even as adobe, monopolized notwithstanding the attention, on account of its lightness and gaiety. Tents of all colors; light wooden structures; deck cabins from the vessels; brush houses lined with cotton cloth, were placed wherever an open space was to be found near the sea. p. 86

Perkins further describes the general chaos of the city, the condition of the streets, the prices of lodgings and food. He decided that San Francisco was not a good place for "establishing a house of business ... according to my first intentions." p. 90 And he went on to the gold mines. If San Francisco's aspect could intimidate men in 1849, it must have been truly frightening to a young widow with an infant to care for. We do not have a record of her thoughts. We assume that she had no relatives in California to help her. We know that she decided in some manner to move to San Jose.

San Jose was a more settled place than San Francisco in 1849. Sawyer describes it

The two most prominate towns in California in 1848 were Yerba Buena (San Francisco) and San Jose. When the gold discovery was made...All the males, with few exceptions, joined the stampede, leaving behind only the old men and the women and children. On account of the favorable location and quietude of the town men from other settlements came to San Jose, left their wives and families and then hurried off to the mines. p. 55

Parties were made up for the mines and explorations were carried on until just before the rainy season when the major part of the gold seekers returned. Before the opening of spring, when new expeditions had been fitted out, the population had largely increased and the city was left in a more secure condition. p. 56.

Elizabeth Mary Roberts had chosen to move to a place where there were plenty of children -- at least in so far as California was concerned. Here we can infer that she was an educated woman because it is noted in her obituary that she opened the first private school in San Jose. We may assume also that she earned enough money to support herself and her small child. Very probably the fathers of her students paid her in gold dust when they returned from the mines.

She taught the children of James and Margaret Reed. Mrs. Reed had once been a widow with a young child herself, and probably understood the other woman's problem. At any rate they became friends and remained so throughout their lives.

Margaret Reed introduced Elizabeth to her brother Robert Cadden Keyes, her children's favorite uncle.

The times were very exciting in San Jose the first years that Elizabeth lived there. The men were not only coming and going to the gold fields, but also trying to help California become a part of the United States. They talked about writing constitutions and attracting the new state government, when it was formed, to San Jose. San Jose elected delegates to the convention, and private citizens went to the convention to lobby for San Jose as governmental seat.

After they were successful in persuading the members to bring the capitol to San Jose, the cozy domesticity of the town was overwhelmed by the elected representatives. There were balls and parties. Much entertaining. In the newspaper column written by Mrs. Fremont Older years later, there is mention of many of the beautiful women who attended these affairs, and of the lovely gowns they wore. Mrs. Roberts name is not mentioned in these social notes. Whether she was still in mourning, or whether she was too tired from teaching to dance we don't know. It is improbable that any woman could escape the notice of the male population given the ratio of men to women during the gold years.

Eventually she became interested in Cad Keyes, enough so that they were married by Isaac Brayton on October 24, 1851. The marriage was recorded April 1853. The record is in the San Jose Historical Museum's Archives.

Margaret Reed, no doubt in the habit of entertaining since the time of the capitol parties, gave a reception that Mrs. Fremont Older reported years later.

One of the handsomest of the early wedding receptions was that given by Mrs. James Frazier Reed at her residence in Third and Margaret Streets in 1852 when her brother, Cadman (sic) Keyes married a widow, Mrs. Elizabeth Roberts. In the Reed garden following the Spanish Californian custom was erected a ramada of willows.

The interior of the arbor was of laurel. Probably the Keyes-Roberts wedding feast was one of the most costly ever served in San Jose. Eggs were \$1 a dozen and the turkeys were \$16 (one ounce of gold dust) each. Mrs. Reed bought 5 turkeys.

#169.

Never one to settle down after a marriage, Elizabeth went to the gold fields with her new husband. Cad had a mine called the Blackleg in Sonora, which he complained about working. It must have been luxurious for a miner to have home cooked meals after a long day of hauling rock.

On July 29, 1852 Humphrey Munroe Keyes was born and named after his paternal grandfather. Elizabeth had a husband, a small son, and a new baby to care for in a gold mining town. It is not recorded what she thought about the life, but earlier that year in March, Perkins said

Sonora is very dull compared to what it used to be; and yet I suppose we must call it improved with its organized police, its halls of Justice, its lawyer's offices, library and printing office; theatres, hotels, balls, dinners and well dressed people; in fact civilization is staring us in the face... What with peaceable citizens,...and down-East strong-minded women, Sonora will soon be unbearable, and all the old settlers will have to move off and seek more congenial shades! p. 314

The town of Sonora seems from Perkin's description an ideal place to live in 1852. He took his own advice and left soon for other places. Shortly thereafter Sonora had a great fire. Almost all of those marvelous advantages disappeared in flames. A few buildings escaped destruction. There are pictures of early Sonora at the research library at the University of the Pacific in Stockton. Perkin's description is quite accurate.

Whether the fire was the reason for Elizabeth and Cad's removal, or whether they simply left when the rains started, or perhaps the mine ran out, or was sold, we don't know. They did leave Sonora.

With her propensity for choosing exciting places, or at least ending up in them, whether by choice or accident, we find them next in New Almaden.

There is a letter in the Illinois State Historical Library written by Cad to his brother in Illinois, telling of his employment at New Almaden as overseer of the hands. His salary was five dollars per day, and he made no complaint about the work as he did at the mine in Sonora. The letter is dated December 25th 1853. They lived at the Hacienda from then until 1865.

Since they chose places to live that were interesting to their contemporaries we know what New Almaden was like when they lived there, just as we had description of Sonora and San Jose.

The Harper's New Monthly Magazine in 1863 printed a description of New Almaden written in 1857.

The first indication of one's proximity to it (the mine) is a small village, or collection of tasteful cottages, neatly painted and inclosed by paling fences, with here and there the evidences of woman's industrious hand in the cultivation of flower-gardens and the fancy trellis-work for woodbine and honey-suckle vines which clamber luxuriantly over some of the dwellings. The families of the superintendants of the works reside here, and live in the enjoyment of rural life, while the constant arrivals of visitors from San Francisco at this romantic spot keeps them "posted" in relation to city affairs and the minutiae of more fashionable life.

By cross checking the records at the San Jose Historical Museum with those at Stanford we know that House 14 was given to Mr. Fiderer when Mr. Keyes moved out. During the time they still lived there another Harper's article in 1865 tells us that

Two lines of stages make a daily trip each way; so that passengers from San Francisco are enabled to reach the mines within four or five hours.

and the author goes on to describe the area

The music of rippling waters chimes pleasantly with the singing of birds and the happy voices of children.

Elizabeth and Cad had three more children while they lived at New Almaden. George Harrison born December 29, 1854, Margaret Elizabeth born in San Jose on February 19, 1857, and Roberta born October 25, 1862.

Life would seem to be ideal in such a pleasant place, but tragedy was the watchword in 1857.

The year started happily with the birth of their first daughter. They named her Margaret. That was February. In March Archy died. He is buried at Oak Hill Cemetary in San Jose. In April Monroe died, and was buried beside his stepbrother. It may have been some contagious disease since the deaths are so close in time.

At the end of the year, in December, the baby daughter of Virginia Reed Murphy, their niece, died. The little child, almost two years old, was named Mattie after her aunt. It seems to have been custom in the family to name children after siblings. Cad had a daughter Margaret. Margaret had a son Cad. And Virginia had a daughter Mattie.

The family lost three small children in less than one year's time. Even living in an exciting, picturesque place which drew many celebrated tourists, and which grew more important with the approach of the Civil War could not compensate parents for such a loss.

It may be at this time that Elizabeth became interested in spiritualism. We know that she had already lost at least three people who were very close to her.

When she lost her friend and sister-in-law she wrote to the members of the family who had remained in Illinois about Margaret's death. The letter and a typescript follow.

Waterbury, Conn.

26/61

Rev. Amosden Sumner
Nov. 28th 1861

My Dear Brother

It is with sincere regret that I write to inform you of the loss of our dear sister Margaret who departed this life Nov. 28th and buried on the 29th. It seems that about ten days since she was taken with a chill which lasted some days, accompanied with very violent pains or cramps over the body, the doctor gave her some Rheumatism which had the effect of producing something of a very violent degree, which then settled on a severe pain in her side, with a cough and in a few days the doctor decided that it had become Bronchitis, which terminated her life. She died a very happy death, perfectly conscious and able to speak within a few seconds of her death ceasing, without a single struggle, she addressed each & all the children separately, wishing them all farewell, she wished them for keeping & said that she could not say, she was so happy, and had a most heavenly expression of countenance both before & after death. One of our South Methodist ministers visited her and prayed with her on the morning of her death when she conversed some with him and showed herself prepared and willing to depart, if they could not do any more for her. You will I know greatly regret.

that you were not with her as the lucky very
much that all her friends could be there
now were be there in time enough to see
her - The night previous James wrote to
as informing us that she had been back but
then was a change for the better, and that
the doctors did not consider her danger-
ous - The next days stage brought word that
she was dying and started immediately but was
just 15 minutes too late to see her living
and the children follow an hour after and
be all returning direct from the funeral last
night they intend telegraphing to you
but Dad thought that you would like to know
some of the particulars without loss of time

It is indeed a great affliction to them all
I fear more for Mr Reed than the others as he
grieves so much for little Willie and I fear
that this will be many degrees worse but they
are all very considerate and attentive to his
every wish, and assist themselves in this ac-
count to cheer & comfort him some

It is a very long time since he received
any letter from either of you more than 3
years I believe. I could have to hand
a moving note marriage to Mr & Robinson
whom Dad could not recall to memory if
he had ever known him

Mattie & her husband are still living at home
which is fortunate as she can help
contribute largely to the comfort of Mr Reed
& the boys, she has two little girls and is
expecting an addition in February next

Jessie and her three are well her
husband did not get elected this last
election as the Republicans carried the day here
Our two little ones George & May are at last
old enough to go to a day school. I wish we
were here they are well. I will now conclude
with our sister kind remembrance to all
trusting hoping that you are all well
Believe me

Yours very affectionately
W. H. Thayer

A short time passed by her departure. Mother
said you will soon see dear Willie's mother and
she looked at her approvingly saying "Why do you
say soon I tell you they are all here little by
now I see Willie, Mary, little Mr. Backhouse
Lloyd & mother Fitch & Maudie all come
to believe in the Heaven. Oh I am so
happy & happy to dear friends

New Almaden Mines
Nov. 28th 1861

My Dear Brothers

It is with sincere regret that I write to inform you of the loss of our Dear Sister Margaret who departed this life Nov. 26th & was buried on the 27th It seems that about ten days since she was taken with a diarrhea which lasted some days, accompanied with very violent pains or cramps over the body, the Doctor gave her some Wheatart which had the effect of producing vomiting to a very violent degree which then settled in a severe pain in her side, with a cough and in a few days the Doctors dedided that it had become Bronchitis, which terminated her life. She died a very happy death, perfectly conscious and able to speak within a few seconds of her breath ceasing, without a single struggle, she addressed Reed & all the children separately wishing them all farewell, she chided them for weeping & said that she could not cry, She was so happy, and had a most heavenly expression of countenance both before & after death One of our South Methodist ministers visited her and prayed with her on the morning of her death when she conversed some with him and shewed herself prepared and willing to depart if they could not do anymore for her - You will I know greatly regret

that you were not with her as she wished very much that all her friends could be there nor were we there in time enough to see her - The night previous James wrote to us informing us that she had been sick but there was a change for the better, and that the doctors did not consider her dangerously so .The next days stage brought word she was dying Cad started immediately but was just 15 minutes to late to see her living I and the children followed an hour after and we all returned direct from the funeral last night They intended telegraphing to you but Cad thought that you would like to know some of the particulars without loss of time It is indeed a great affliction to them all I fear more for Mr. Reed than the others as he grieved so much for little Willie and I fear that this will be many degrees worse but they are all very considerate and attentive to his every wish and exert themselves on his account to cheer and comfort him some

It is a very long time since he received any letters from either of you more than 3 years I believe. A card came to hand announcing Net's marriage to a Mr. G. Robertson whom Cad could not recall to memory if he had ever known him

Mattie & her husband are still living at home XXX which is fortunate as she can help contribute largely to the comfort of Mr. Reed & the boys, she has two little girls and is expecting an addition in February next

Virginia and her three are well her
husband did not get reelected this last
election as the Republicans carried the day here

Our two little ones George & Mag are at last
old enough to go to a day school which we
have here They are well. I will now conclude
with our united kind remembrances to all

sincerely hoping that you are all well

Believe me

Yours Very Affectionately

E. M. Keyes

A short time previous to her departure Mattie
said you will soon see dear Willie Mother and
she looked at her reprovingly saying "Why do you
say soon I tell you they are all here with me
now I see Willie, Mary, Salle Mr. Backenstoe
Loyd & Mother Archy & Monroe all come
to welcome me to Heaven Oh I am so
happy so happy dear friends

The people Elizabeth mentions in the postscript of the letter are:

Willie -- Margaret's son who had died a year earlier in 1860;

Mary -- Probably Mary Donner Houghton who also died in 1860;

Salle -- I have been as yet unable to identify her;

Mr. Backenstoe -- Margaret's first husband. Virginia's father;

Loyd -- I have not been able to identify him;

Mother -- Sarah Hanly Keyes who died on the trail to California;

Archy -- Elizabeth's first son;

Monroe -- Elizabeth's second son.

The postscript indicates the spiritualist concept of the dead coming to greet and guide a loved one. Many people were interested in esoteric studies during this time. Famous spiritualists toured the West from Europe and the Eastern United States.

Elizabeth and Cad remained in New Almaden until 1865. They watched it grow. They were there during all the legal turmoil of ownership and nationalization. The Stanford archival material indicates that Cad had to testify during the trials, and that he had some part in the building of the public buildings at the hacienda. He seems to have been responsible for the purchase of the materials.

Misfortune was never far from Elizabeth. At some time her third son George suffered brain damage. We know that he was in day school at the time of Margaret's

death, but something happened that kept him from developing his intellectual capacity.

In 1865, shortly before his death, Cad moved his family to San Jose. They bought a house (or built one) at 49 North Thirteenth Street. When Elizabeth lost this husband she did not marry again, but lived with her small family in San Jose to the end of her life. When she died George was admitted to Agnews State Hospital. Margaret, her daughter died a year after she did. Roberta lived with her husband, Grove de Zaldo, in the house on Thirteenth Street for many years.

Elizabeth's obituaries show that in her later years she was interested in the Pioneer Society and Spiritual Union.

The San Jose Daily Mercury for Monday morning February 24, 1902 listed her death this way.

MRS. KEYES BURIED

Old age calls pioneer woman after long and useful life.

The funeral of Mrs. E. M. Keyes, who died at her home, No. 49 North Thirteenth Street, shortly after 7 o'clock Thursday evening, took place from there at 2:00 p.m. yesterday. Her death was due to general infirmities of old age.

Mrs. Keyes was a member of the Pioneer Society, and came here from Australia in 1849. She was born in Faversham, Kent, England in 1820 and emigrated while very young.

Mrs. Keyes came to this country with her first husband H. L. (sic) Roberts, who died shortly after their arrival. About a year later she opened the first private school ever conducted in this city, which she conducted until her marriage with Mr. Keyes.

Since her arrival from Australia the deceased had been a constant resident of San Jose, and had a large circle of friends. Two daughters and one son survive her.

The funeral which was under the auspices of the Pioneer Society and the Spiritual Union, was largely attended. The pallbearers were Messrs. Vinter, Baily, Woodhams, Crawford, Church, and Murvals. The burial was in Oak Hill Cemetary.

It is probable that Roberta gave the biographical information to the newspaper. Margaret would have remembered going to school and living in New Almaden. Roberta may not have been old enough to remember.

Perhaps Elizabeth never spoke of her earlier life to the children, so that they did not know about Sonora and the things that seem so interesting to us. It is possible even that Elizabeth did not think it interesting enough to talk about, but that seems odd in light of her membership in the Pioneer Society.

It is difficult to accurately sumerize the life of a loved one during the stress of loss. It is hoped that this paper conveys some of the interesting facets of a pioneer life.

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