

Volume 29

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No. 4

Behold John Elija Wimmer in his old age! When just a lad, he had discovered gold at Coloma.



When John was 8 years old, his father was the construction boss for James Marshall in the building of a saw mill at Coloma on the south fork of the American River. The weather: cold and clear. The time: late January 1848. The calendar day: possibly the 19th, possibly the 24th. After the water had run through the mill race, John found a gold specimen. John hurriedly brought the glittering piece to his mother who ran the boarding house for the hired help. She, then, in turn showed it at supper time to "Pa" (Peter Wimmer) who passed it on to the next fellow, and so on to James Marshall, boss of the mill, who sat at the head of the table. It is claimed that Marshall was the 7th person to look at it.

The Wimmer's had come overland in 1846 with the Harlan-Young Party who were just ahead of the Reed-Donner group that met with tragedy. They were a humble family later settling in San Luis Obispo County. Here John was raised till he married and moved to Los Gatos where he died in 1914 and is buried in the memorial park there. His children that surround him are (left to right): Mamie, Wona (granddaughter), Bessie and 'Chick,' the 3rd son. Two other sons, Jack and Deed, are not shown.

H.C.

WHALE BLAZERS

SAN JOSE, 1902 —

Hotel Vendome announced the opening of their bathing pavilion to the public with a competent attendant on hand. A swimming professor was available for lessons also. Wednesday was ladies day when no gentlemen were admitted.

SAN JOSE, November 1902 —

The Board of Education was in the midst of weekly fumigating each schoolroom thoroughly by burning sulphur. Officials believed contagious and infectious diseases might occur at anytime with crowded conditions.

SAN JOSE, 1903 —

The Letcher Machine Co. here made it known its expert mechanics not only repaired cash registers, slot machines, music boxes and dental equipment but also automobiles.

PALO ALTO, 1907 —

The stone barriers forbidding gasoline buggies on the Stanford campus were being removed.

SAN JOSE, December 1911 —

With a shortage of \$1900 in the police fund, 'blue-coats' were informed they would have to accept a pay cut for the month and would have to make "both ends meet on half pay."

WILLOW GLEN, January 1912 —

The task of forming a fire district looked great here with the purchase of a pair of chemical fire extinguishers along with volunteers to operate them was developing heat.

October 1912 —

'Rup' Jeffkins, Australian "Speed King" motored from Oakland to San Jose in 47 minutes bearing a message from the Oakland mayor to Mayor Monahan of San Jose. Minutes after its delivery he was arrested on a charge of 'reckless speeds.'

PALO ALTO, 1913 —

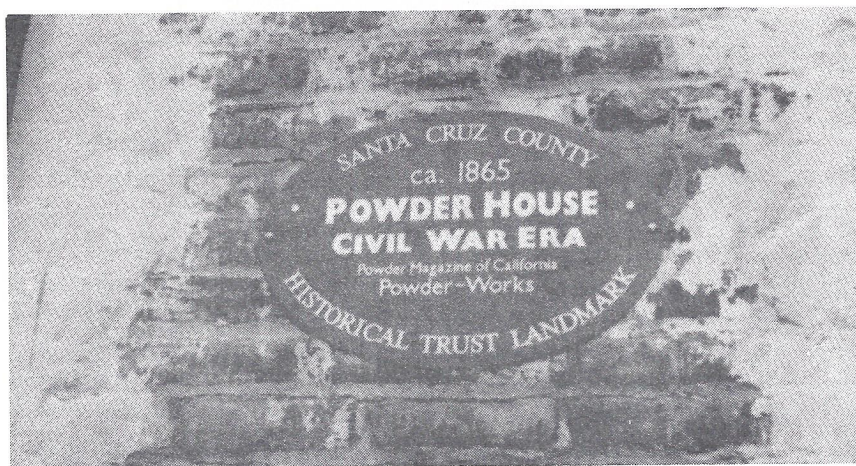
"Pensions for Mothers" Such a plan was endorsed by the ladies of the town, including fraternal and church groups. It was suggested the proposed bill be drawn on conservative lines and would be introduced as "Mothers' Pension Bill."

LOS GATOS, 1913 —

An ordinance prohibiting noises within the city limits was aimed at the railroad with their blowing steam in the railroad yard. It was also a violation for them to blow their whistles within 1000 feet on the north and 500 feet south of the depot. The Lyndon Hotel here helped 'engineer' the action.

WHEN POWDERMILL FLAT WAS A BLAST !

By Hank Calloway



The need for a highly explosive black blasting powder goes back to 1861 when the California Powder Works established its first production plant two miles up the meandering San Lorenzo River from the ocean at Santa Cruz. By 1864 it was the first to produce smokeless blasting powder on the West Coast.

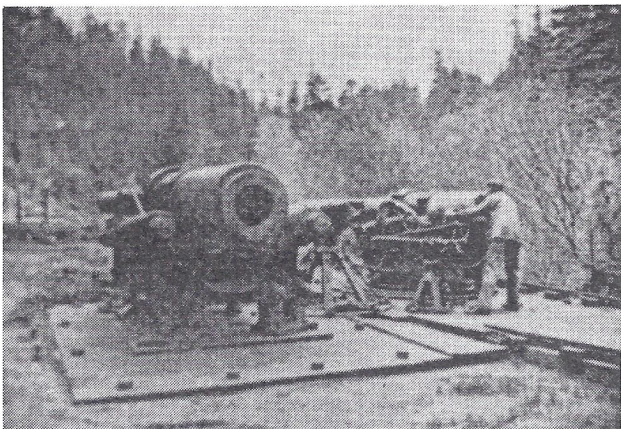
Mining, at this critical time, was demanding the impact of such an explosive as were the surging builders of the Central Pacific Railroad, also substantial demands from the military assisted in causing prices to soar.

The government, then, prohibited the shipping of powder by sea to prevent it from falling to the Confederacy, this then made it crucial for such an operation to locate on the West Coast.

By May 1865, in just a years time, it was recorded Powdermill Flat on the San Lorenzo had already produced 150,000 25-pound kegs of the sought after explosive.

The task of producing blasting powder was considered somewhat simple. The makings consisted of charcoal made at the site by burning of madrone and alder trees. This was then mixed with sulphur and nitrate of potash which was shipped from South America, the East Coast and even Europe. Such ingredients were carefully measured to exact amounts then placed into 'wheel houses' for mixing. The 'houses' were of sturdy concrete on three sides with the roof and fourth wall consisting of fragile material facing hill sides so in the event of an explosion the force was directed through the fragile sections.

Powdermill Flat was well densified with gum trees, among others for the purpose of snaring flying ruins from expected explosions. Precautions to safeguard employees were perpetual. The plant operation employed some 275, all knowing the hazard with which they lived. Workers put in nine hour days, six days a week for two dollars a day.



One other vulnerable work site was the corning mill where slabs 20'' x 30'' and 1 ¼ inches thick were pressed into pellets to be glazed with graphite, where they were then emptied into kegs made at the site by Chinese. The kegs consisted of oak staves while hazel brush provided barrel hoops. The Chinese barrel output being one a minute.

Margaret Koch in her absorbing "History of Santa Cruz County" states how two large cannons were put to use to test the powder which was in great demand during the Spanish-American war (1898-1903).

Powder kegs were hauled to Santa Cruz for shipment by horse teams to the Powder-mill Wharf which was then located between the present Casino and the Municipal Wharf.

One of the most terrorizing blasts at the Flat happened on April 26, 1898 heard and felt for miles. It killed 13 men and injured 15 others. A Santa Cruz native who was a student at Holy Cross School at the time remembered the terror she felt when "streams of sparks flew past my window like lightning." Ever so many evacuated their homes and fled towards the beach.

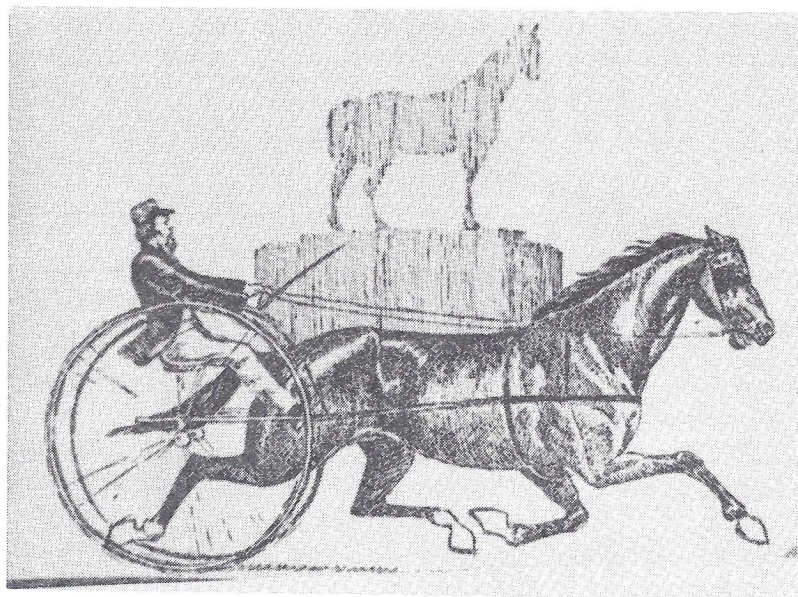
By 1906 the now becalmed California Powder Co. sold out to Du Pont, however, the U.S. Justice Departments Anti-Trust Division objected to such a purchase going on to declare Du Pont a monopoly.

By 1914 Powder Mill Flat had ceased production going on to be absorbed by the Hercules operation at Contra Costa County. In 1953 a single accident there took the lives of twelve men in the dynamite factory. This event became a major factor in the reshaping of the Hercules, Inc.'s "future." By 1964 the company had stopped making explosives and turned solely to the manufacture of fertilizers, later selling this plant to Valley Nitrogen Co. of Fresno.

Today the long perilous 138 acre Flat has since been converted to the tranquil Paradise Park Masonic Club where a third or more are year-round residents, others seasonal. This wise choice was made in 1924 by Fraternal spirited Masons who purchased it from the Hercules Powder Co. In legal terms it is a corporation where members share in its benefits, privileges and conveniences such as roads, fire protection, the clear winding San Lorenzo River, towering redwoods, its ferns and shrubs. Here one can marvel at a number of the original 'powder houses' which have since been incorporated into captivating dwellings some with walls being almost 18 inches thick. Today the nostalgic Paradise Park Masonic Club office was formerly the home of the assistant superintendent of the California Powder Works.

Palo Alto Stock Farm

By Bill Chivers



Before Stanford University evolved into a world famous technological institution that it is today, railroad magnate, former California Governor and U.S. Senator Leland Stanford was experimenting in scientific breeding and training of "trotters" on his stock farm at Palo Alto, California. It is said that he was considered the first place trotting horse breeder in the world, at a time when many breeders thought speed in a horse was a result of chance rather than hereditary qualities. Leland Stanford advocated cross breeding trotters with the best of English thoroughbred stock. His goal was to get the superior qualities of each without disturbing resulting colts trotting inclination.

Stanford also had new ideas for training trotters. His Palo Alto system would start training the colts as soon as they were weaned, and driving the horse at full speed for a short distance instead of the standard practice of longer distances at slower speeds. He also believed in getting the best qualities of an animal by kindness and encouragement. His horses were never touched by a whip. Every detail for the comfort and care of the mares and their foals were looked after. Excellent stables, roomy stalls and capable attendants were provided, and special food prepared. It was said that Stanford's stables were as quiet and orderly as a church, and that loud talking, swearing, harsh language and scolding were not allowed.

Stanford's stock farm success started when he purchased "Electioneer" for \$12,000. He called this horse "the most prepotent sire the world has ever known." The superintendent of the farm said he was the greatest of all trotting sires. In 14 years at Palo Alto, he sired 166 colts that could trot a mile in less than two and one-half minutes. Electioneer himself set no records having gone lame in 1871 at the age of 3 years.

Stanford noticed Electioneer at Stony Ford Stud Farm on a buying spree in New York. He casually inquired of a number of experts on fine horseflesh about what they thought of Electioneer, and found them all against him. The horse was nine years old. He had good ancestry but showed little trotting promise either as a sire of winners or a winner himself, but Stanford was noted for a judge of good horseflesh himself. He liked the horse and bought it. He later said he bought him because the horse had heavy shoulders like a "cart horse" and high hindquarters like a steer, and was willing to pay much more than the asking price. Electioneer died of the disease sciatica in December 1890. It was believed by the trainer that the disease cut short his life by at least five years. Electioneer's three most famous colts were Sunol, Arion and Palo Alto.

Sunol set the world trotting record for two year olds in 1888 at 2:18 minutes. In the following years she won records for three, four and five year olds. She also won the "all age" category making her the world champion trotter and the first to hold all age records. She was sold for \$41,000. Sunol's trainer said that she was terribly high strung and cranky. Every time it was necessary to bring her under control, there was trouble, but keeping with Stanford's rules for the stables, all were as gentle with her as possible. Still it took an hour to get her hitched to the sulky. He said every individual hair on her seemed to contain a nerve.

The next champion offspring was Arion. He set records for two year olds in 1891 with a new time of 2:10-3/4, and his record stood for 18 years. In 1892, Stanford sold Arion for \$125,000.

The third famous colt showed such promise that Stanford honored him with the name "Palo Alto," but bad luck plagued this horse and cut short his life. Palo Alto was injured in 1888 when a fire occurred at the stables in which the farm's most prized horses were boarded. Palo Alto might have died along with several others but for the quick action of a trainer who struck the frightened horse a hard blow with the handle of a stable fork dazing the animal so he could be led to safety. On July 21, 1892, this prize-winning horse died of pneumonia and is buried on the farm in the horse cemetery. His death was lamented by horsemen as a "national loss."

A little known fact of Stanford's Stock Farm was a series of experiments that contributed materially towards the creation of the motion picture industry. Stanford had long wondered whether a horse propelled himself by pulling with his forefeet or pushing with his hindfeet. He tried to answer his question by measuring the depth of the feet of horses in motion. He also had a theory that at some point in its gait a trotter had all four feet off of the ground. He turned to the use of photography to answer this question and in 1872 hired an English photographer, Eadweard J. Muybridge, to get a picture, if possible, of "Occident" (Stanford's first fast horse) with all four feet in the air. It wasn't until 1878 that Muybridge perfected a system at Stanford's suggestion using a series of 24 cameras placed at 12 inch intervals with string stretched across the track which would activate the shutters when the horse hit them. After many changes and experimenting, Muybridge took a series of two dozen positions in silhouette and printed them on a large glass desk that revolved so that the pictures passed in rapid succession by a slot in front of a projection camera. The pictures thus shown in motion verified Stanford's contention that at one point in the stride of a trotter all four feet were off the ground. It was also learned that the same muscles were used in trotting as in running. This and subsequent photographic experiments portraying the attitudes of men and animals in motion under the direction and patronage of Leland Stanford contributed materially toward creating the motion picture industry.

Leland Stanford's love of horses was truly shown when he created a cemetery for many of his prize horses on the farm. The cemetery was started in 1888 when several horses died in a tragic fire. Among them was a much highly regarded yearling filly named "Norlaine." Stanford selected the most beautiful spot on the farm for her burial place. As time rolled on, her plot created a memorial burying ground for 18 other famous horses who died at Palo Alto.

Leland Stanford's death on June 28, 1893 brought it all to an end. The estate had to be settled. Government notes against his railroad fell due and law suits over distribution were filed. The new university was in danger of closing. Mrs. Stanford, the widow, rose to the occasion. Belt tightening and economy followed. She dismissed personal and household servants. The horses were sold and the racing department discontinued. It was largely through her efforts that the holdings were rescued and the university survived. The Farm was closed in 1903. Today, the old red barn that was restored to its original appearance in 1984 is all that remains of the once proud farm. There is a life-size statue of "Electioneer" in front of the restored red barn. Nearby in the quad is a plaque recognizing Stanford and Muybridge's experiments that aided in the development of motion pictures.

HOUSE HUNTING IN OUR VALLEY — 1903

MONDAY:

Morgan Hill - A seven room house on a corner lot 50 × 130 feet for \$700.

TUESDAY:

Sunnyvale - A six room modern home on San Francisco Road - \$1,250.

WEDNESDAY:

Cupertino - A 7-room house on a lot 62 × 137 ft. Price \$2,500.

THURSDAY:

Santa Clara - 9¾ acres of a full bearing prune orchard, near town, house of 4 rooms, barn, well, windmill and tank - \$4000.

FRIDAY:

Saratoga - 20 acres on Prospect Road - full bearing orchard, produced \$2,500 to \$3,000 annually - house of 7 rooms. \$12,000.

SATURDAY:

Edenvale - 80 acres, 60 acres of first class orchard top soil, 20 acres of hay land, good 'cottage' of 8 rooms, fine barn, water. \$25,000.

Our Domestic Ice Age



The ice tinkling in your glass today probably didn't travel but a few feet to be replenished. Such convenience may not recall the ice box and pick days back in the pre-electric refrigerator era of say 1913 when the San Jose Ice Co. used horses and wagons to meet the city and county's ice needs. It had 27 horses and generally used 10 wagons in the summer rush season featuring hefty ice chunks with ice cubes yet to be.

Such recall was offered in a 1948 San Jose Mercury News interview by the late James E. Bailey who had delivered ice for the San Jose Ice Co. He began his career as a teamster with the firm in 1910. "We supplied the entire San Jose area," he said, "as we were the only ice company around. We used to drive our teams as far as Los Gatos and Mt. View to deliver. In 1914 the company acquired a Ford truck, a 1913 affair which was really a touring car with the back seat cut away and a box built in its place."

By 1917 Bailey remembers the delivery service was completely motorized. Eight trucks were Model-T Fords, one a De Martini assembled in San Jose by Gene and Henry Artana. "The converted touring cars were called 'jitneys' and could handle 3000 pounds of ice."

"We delivered ice to the breweries before prohibition when 100 pound ice blocks were usual. Each time a driver carried in a 100 pound block he was usually offered to 'have a beer.' By the days end it sometimes amounted to a considerable amount."

Bailey said that despite the great prevalence of the incoming mechanical refrigerators by the 1930's the consumption of ice had increased steadily and was several times greater in the San Jose and immediate areas than it had been in 1921.

In the horse and wagon period the San Jose firm could produce up to 90 tons of ice a day. If this was insufficient to meet demands in hot summer seasons, the supply was supplemented by shipments of lake and pond ice from Truckee where as much as 300,000 tons of ice was used to refrigerate California produce shipped East. After 1872 it was also used to cool the mine shafts in the Comstock Lode.

Bailey had remained with the San Jose Ice Co. for 22 years, leaving in 1935 to go in the ice business for himself.

H.C.

SMOKE SIGNALS

AUTHORS-AUTHORS Our December 3rd Luncheon will feature a captivating collection of regional history books by our own Pioneer authors that will be on sale at this time. Authors, please call 294-1786 if you plan to participate.

The San Jose Historical Museum Association is presently offering their new membership premium book, "SAN JOSE: CITY WITH A PAST" for supporting the museum in 1989. This attractive 112 page hard bound book focuses on downtown San Jose with 125 'black & white' photographs from 1850 to the present. Memberships start at \$30 for single and \$40 for a family after January 1, 1989. Joining prior to this date will entitle singles to \$25 and families to \$35 memberships.

The Victorian Christmas at the San Jose Historical Museum will be held in more or less two parts this year. Tea and Luncheon will be held on Thursday and Friday, December 8 & 9 leaving Saturday and Sunday, December 10 & 11 for the family type of enjoyment with costumes, activities, entertainment, the trolleys, etc. Adults \$3, Seniors \$2.50 and children \$2.

Cheers to the Cupertino Historical Society and its captivating 'Traveling Trunk' journeys which include schools and senior day care groups. At the helm of this popular roadshow are our Henrietta Marcotte and Hazel Fretwell.

"BY THE SWEAT OF THY BROW" The California History Center heralds 100 years of organized labor with this latest exhibit. By January 1888 over 2000 unionists already lived in San Jose going on to create the Santa Clara County Federation of Trades. Many artifacts on exhibit include: printing, mining, carpentry, house building methods and including household items of the times. Admission Free — 8 a.m.-noon and 1 p.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday thru Friday and 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturdays. Runs until March 18, 1989.

Argonauts Are Back! This stimulating group are those who were members of Clyde Arbuckle's history classes. They are holding their first meetings assisted by Mary Mueller who long championed their travel interests while associated with the Metropolitan Adult Education Program. This 'on the move' assemblage has already scheduled guest speakers, trips and audio-visual presentations. Happy Trails, Gang.

The Los Gatos Museum is now offering "MEMORIES OF THE 1939 FAIR AT TREASURE ISLAND" in San Francisco Bay arranged by our own Bill Chivers, The Trailblazer's Assistant Editor. The Forbes Mill Regional History Museum, is at 75 Church Street, Los Gatos. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. except Mondays. Phone 395-7375.

The Saratoga Historical Foundation reminds us that Saratoga is quite proud of having several buildings designed by Julia Morgan.

Many are familiar with the tearful Indian "Iron Eyes" Cody and his "Myths and Images of Cowboys and Indians." His accounts stress the fact that textbooks written from the Anglos point of view should be corrected; that movies portraying Indians should give reasons for scalping and brutality; also such words as squaw, buck, papoose, should be omitted. The Indian women were modest and moral and there were no curse words in the Indian language.

At this time some of our Sacramento representatives are at it again. They desire to renounce "I Love You California" as our State Song. This S O S appeal is sought by the Native Daughters Grand President Dorothy Coats pleading we all contact our representatives at once from the governor on down. State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814.

STAMP OF APPROVAL AND BRAVO to our Ralph Rambo and Theron Fox for their recent "Carreta" U.S. postage stamp design.

A venerable oak that once stood in the old Hotel Vendome grounds on North First Street was of timely interest when the Native Daughters held their Grand Parlor session in San Jose in 1937. Tradition, backed by records of the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County, stated that this was the very oak under which Franciscan Fathers held the first religious service in the valley in 1777. It had associations with the Vendome Parlor No. 100, N.D.G.W. for it was on the Vendome grounds where the Parlor was formed in 1915. The scene has all changed now with the Vendome Hotel only a memory and its once expansive landscaped grounds now a swank subdivision...while our "Daughters" still convene.

Unless you are a Life Member your dues become due January 1, 1989. Dues are \$5 annually, per person; so make out your check to the California Pioneers and send it along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to California Pioneers to Santa Clara County, P.O. 8208, San Jose, CA 95155. You will receive your membership card in the mail. Of course, you can pay your dues at the December Luncheon.

MANY HAPPY RETURNS TO THE DAY Come this November 29th San Jose will be 211 years of age. The founding site was on or near the present Civic Center in 1777 under the Command of Lt. Jose Moraga, 14 Settlers and their families comprising a company of 66 persons.



Touring With The Californians

RESERVATIONS by phone begin Monday, December 6, for members only. Call Nancy Hill at 258-3449 Monday through Friday, preferably mornings. After Nancy confirms your reervation, make check payable to THE CALIFORNIANS and send to P.O. Box 32121, San Jose, CA 95152. After the quarterly meeting a Trip Brochure may be obtained by sending a stamped self-addressed legal-sized envelope to the above address. We encourage you to use the waiting list if your desired trip is full.

OZARK MOUNTAIN COUNTRY, KANSAS, OKLAHOMA, ARKANSAS, MISSOURI A few highlights are: Mt. Music Jubilees, Clydesdale Farms, Passion Play, Will Rogers' Birthplace, Truman's Library and Home. You-all Come Now and Visit this Heartland of America. May 9-19, 1989.

Watch for three all new ONE DAY TRIPS planned for January, February, March.

HURRY! HURRY! LAST CALL for the pretentious 100th Anniversary Edition of the ROSE PARADE. Grandstand seats plus four fabulous nights at the Hyatt-Regency, Long Beach, December 30-January 3.

Mark your calendar and line-up your roommate for the August 1989 voyage in a Coastal Steamer into the FJORDS OF NORWAY from Bergen to the North Cape and on to the meeting of Norway, Finland and USSR. These Mail Boats go into fjords that major cruise ships cannot navigate, giving us a chance to meet the local people as they stop to unload mail and cargo.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Virginia Bittle
Valentine Aimee Dugan
Yvonne Olson Jacobsen
Kette Kmetovic
Maxine A. Moore
Laverna Morgan

Dana E. Nowak
George Souza
Jean Souza
Arline Veteska
Jon Veteska



Herman Buscher
Betty Cheney
May Hickcox

Viola Kaphingst
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