



RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

SPRING 2016 • ISSUE 132

An Official Publication of the Healdsburg Museum & Historical Society

Life Stories

In This Issue

For this issue of the *Russian River Recorder* we assembled a diverse collection of biographical stories and first-person narratives from Northern Sonoma County residents, past and present.

First-time contributor Elizabeth Branstead of South Carolina has written an extensively researched article about Joe Piatt and her Piatt ancestors of Healdsburg.

Museum staff members Whitney Hopkins and Jane Bonham contributed brief biographies of two unique and notable individuals: early Seventh-Day Adventist missionary, Dr. Merritt G. Kellogg, and 1890s journalist, Lizzie Livernash, Managing Editor of the *Healdsburg Enterprise*. Both are buried in Oak Mound Cemetery and featured in our current exhibit, "Discover Oak Mound Cemetery."

College intern Lauren Carriere profiled John and Mary Tucker, a memorable and self-sufficient blind couple of pioneer Healdsburg.

Effie Robinson, the first black child born in Healdsburg, was the subject of an oral history

interview in 2001. Effie's account of her upbringing in Healdsburg highlights how strong family values shaped her successful future.

Many people do not realize that the infamous Donner Party tragedy had local connections. Donner Party survivor William C. Graves lived at Pine Flat when he published his story in the *Russian River Flag* in 1877. This article is just one example of the fascinating discoveries that can be found in the historical online newspapers through the California Digital Newspaper Collection.

We round out the issue with Gabriel Fraire's interview with Eric Ziedrich, owner of longtime local business, Healdsburg Lumber Company. As Eric concludes, "It hasn't been easy, but man, it's been a fun ride."

We hope that you find this issue of the *Recorder*, a fun—and informative—ride.

Holly Hoods, Executive Director/Curator
Pamela Vana-Paxhia, Editor



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The Official Publication of the
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Source: Elizabeth Branstead

Joe Piatt, c.1891

Old Joe Piatt

by Elizabeth Branstead

He was an old timer all right. Joe was born in Columbia County, Pennsylvania, on March 8, 1826.

Joe's father, David Piatt, married a Quaker girl when he was 19 years old and she was just 16. The year was 1816. The young Quaker girl, Hannah Bonsall Jackson, was excommunicated for marrying out of her faith. Consequently, David and Hannah were on their own with only a few other Piatts living nearby.

At first there were no children. Then, approximately ten years after their wedding, Joe was born. He was the first of what would eventually be eleven children. After Joe's birth, the other children followed approximately every two years like clockwork.

On His Own

When Joe reached a certain age, he had become too much for his father to whip into shape, so he was sent off to live with his mother's brother, Josiah. Over the years, Joe acquired some carpentry skills and a little blacksmithing, just like his father. Joe's specialty became building wagons.

By the age of 22, Joe was on his own and working on a farm in South Bend, Indiana, for Jonathan and Rebecca Hardy. He was good at building and making repairs and served as a general handyman. Joe liked working for Jonathan, but he

particularly liked Jonathon and Rebecca's daughter, Eliza Carper Hardy.

Ultimately, Joe became restless. He talked to the many folks passing through South Bend on their way to Oregon and California. He eventually seized an opportunity to be a wrangler for a wagon train. Joe ended up in Sacramento and worked in a Tuolumne County bauxite mine over the winter.

The following spring Joe got word that his father had died in an accident. He decided to head back to South Bend, Indiana. As an added incentive to return, Joe was pining for Eliza. He hitched a ride with a wagon party heading back home to Indiana.

This was the first of three trips that Joe would make across the plains by wagon. In later years, Joe's son Arthur would relate stories of cowboys and Indians; dramatic rescues of his little sister Bertha from Indians; stories of his mother, the 4'11" Eliza, holding off Indian attacks by repeatedly firing her shotgun from the back of a wagon while they raced across the plains.

Eliza was a caring, kind-hearted woman who was also a no-nonsense kind of frontier woman. Joe was a stalwart, hard-working man who loved his family.

Over the next 20 years, Joe and Eliza set up housekeeping in Mission San Jose and then in Vallejo where he worked for the U.S. Army as a wagon master.

Joe's oldest grandson, Harold, wrote "in 1875 the family moved to El Paso, Illinois, where a buggy business was established. J.P. Piatt handled the upholstery and blacksmithing. Charlie, the eldest son, did the woodwork. Arthur handled the iron work and Walter, the youngest, did the paint and varnish work."



Source: Elizabeth Branstead
Eliza Carper Hardy Piatt

Eliza was a church-going woman and soon joined the El Paso Methodist church. She persuaded her husband and children to come with her to Sunday school and services. The minister was Reverend Joseph Smith Millsap, a highly respected, itinerant Methodist preacher working the Rock Springs Circuit.

Julia Elizabeth (Lizzie) Millsap was the only daughter of Rev. Joseph and his wife Martha Jane (Mattie) Beeson Smith. She was talented, educated, played the piano and was well-loved by the church community.

The family story is that on a rebound failed romance Lizzie married Charles Edwin (C. E.) Piatt on September 2, 1879, in El Paso. It was the wedding of the season. It's a bit of a mystery why such a well-educated woman would marry a wagon-maker, but such is the story of many a young couple.

Back to California

By 1880, Joe had his fill of Midwestern life and longed for California. He and Eliza decided to move to Healdsburg where he had heard it was a good place to raise a family and a good place to set up shop as a carriage maker and blacksmith.

Four years later, the Rev. Joseph and Mattie Millsap decided to retire from El Paso. They also

wanted to be closer to their only daughter. As newlyweds, Charles and Lizzie Piatt had moved to Kansas on a half section farm where their first child was born. They, too, were ready to move to Healdsburg to be close to the family.



Source: Elizabeth Branstead
Charles Edwin and Julia Elizabeth (Lizzie) Millsap Piatt

Joe's grandson, Harold, tells the story of his parents' move, "The trip was made from Harrington, Kansas on a Santa Fe emigrant train. Each household was allotted space in a sleeping car and space in a freight car for household goods and livestock. There was a cook stove in the sleeper and stops were made to feed and water the stock. Usually the stops were for two hours or more and sometimes all night. About ten days were required to reach Bakersfield where those going north were switched to the Southern Pacific Railroad. Another switch was required in San Francisco to the Northwest Pacific Railroad to Healdsburg.

"The family finally arrived in Healdsburg about December 1, 1884. A house was rented . . . Mr. Piatt's father had moved to Healdsburg a few years earlier and he had a blacksmith shop there. Again the family took over the shop work. However, it soon became apparent that the local trade would not support so many families. Mr. C.E. Piatt therefore opened a photographic studio. The studio was located in the second floor of the building facing the city square at the S.W. corner.

"On arriving at Healdsburg, the family lived on Hayden Street until after a daughter, Grace, was born on March 28, 1885. Soon after that a small farm was purchased about 2½ miles east of Windsor Station and about 6 miles from the studio.

"During the summer of 1887 a tour was made of the springs and resorts of Sonoma and Lake County. A portable studio was set up at each stop

and photos of the guests were made. This, of course, preceded the advent of the Kodak. Pictures were made on wet plates. Later the dry plate was introduced.

“The winter of 1887-88, Charles (C.E. Piatt) spent in a studio in Grass Valley, California while his wife maintained the studio in Healdsburg.

It was a financial struggle for Joe and his sons. Joe, Walter, and Arthur advertised their carriage making and repair business in the local paper. The shop was located close to the corner of South [Matheson] and Center Streets, lot 44. In a good year they made about 45 vehicles.

Walter took a job working as a salesman for a paint company based in San Francisco in 1886. Shortly afterwards, Arthur took ownership of the carriage business, but it seemed to be a more loosely held business since he and his family moved to Marysville. Charley and Lizzie still had roots in the town. Their children went to school and Lizzie was an active member of the Healdsburg Methodist church where she was a contralto in the choir. In a bid to earn a little money, she offered piano and singing lessons to the community.



Source: Elizabeth Branstead

Piatt Children and their Spouses - George Arthur, Lenore Willey (wife of Walter Joseph), Alice (wife of George Arthur), Walter McLean (standing, husband of Bertha), Bertha (seated in front of husband), Julia Elizabeth (Lizzie) Millsap (wife of Charles Edwin), Walter Joseph, Charles Edwin - 1889

During the 1880s when Charles was establishing himself as a photographer, he took a number of pictures of his wife and his family. He signed his photographs, C.E. Piatt, Artist. Charles mastered the technique of posing the family and then scurrying around to get in the photograph himself.

When Joe and Eliza settled in Healdsburg, they created a life that quickly brought their four children and families into the fold. Two children married in Healdsburg and five of the ten grandchildren were born here.



Source: Elizabeth Branstead

Piatt Family at the beach – Grandma Millsap with Grace, “Aunt” Ann Jordan, Lizzie Millsap Piatt, C.E. Piatt holding Fred and Harold, c. 1889.

Eliza Carper Hardy, the adventurous and warm-hearted wife of Joe, died on June 15, 1891. She is buried in Oak Mound Cemetery.

Life After Lizzie

After Eliza died, Joe was the only Piatt left in Healdsburg. He was a likeable fellow and had held onto his carriage business. Fortunately, his son Arthur looked after him and the business, but he was only there part of the time.

That left Joe alone and lonely. Much to everyone’s surprise, Joe took the train to San Francisco to find himself a new wife.

Joe was 71 years old when he met Martha C. Alberts. She was just 26 years old and freshly emigrated from Hamburg, Germany. Joe and Martha married in 1897. Ten months later, in May 1898, she gave birth to a girl, named Martha, in Healdsburg.

Shock (and perhaps scandal) turned to dismay and sorrow, when the young wife and mother died one month later as a result of childbirth complications. Old Joe, age 72, became the sole parent of a baby girl. Old Joe’s daughter, Bertha, and son-in-law Walter McLean, took the baby in and raised her as their own.

Old Joe hired a live-in housekeeper who kept him company until he died on April 16, 1904, at the age of 78. He is buried in Oak Mound Cemetery next to his wife.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Healdsburg Enterprise at the Southeast corner of Matheson Street and Healdsburg Avenue, 1892.
L-R: Lizzie Livernash, John Livernash, Mary Livernash, Ed Duncan, Florence Keane, Ed Thompson*

Lizzie Livernash, Journalist and More

by Jane Bonham

Elizabeth Livernash was born in California in February of 1869, the second of nine children. By 1876, the family had moved to Cloverdale.

In 1890, the Livernash brothers, Edward James and John Joseph (J.J.), purchased Healdsburg's newspaper, *The Healdsburg Enterprise*. Sister Lizzie wrote a regular social column for the front page under the pen name "Mignonette." (*Mignonette ...a flowering bush with spikey blooms that have a sweet, ambrosial scent.*)

In 1891, Lizzie bought Edward's interest. In 1893, John moved to San Francisco and Lizzie added managerial tasks to her responsibilities. In 1898, the paper was sold to Mr. W. Harper, a newspaperman from Spokane.

At the report of the sale, it was written, "*Her pen has won hosts of friends for her throughout the county, and the special department of the paper which she conducted will be missed by the ladies in hundreds of homes. It is not too much to say that 'Mignonette' has performed a task in the last few years we think, that not many men could have carried out.*"

Julius Myron Alexander included her in his description of those born to the pen who "*had other*

visions than digging in the earth and the holding of the frying pan handle...with their dreams and ideals...out under the wild flowers and the shade of the madronas." While that is accurate, Lizzie had to find time for her writing while also caring for others.

Pneumonia took her father from the family in 1889. The 1890 census shows Lizzie in Healdsburg heading a household of siblings.

The care provided to her ailing husband, Frank Koenig, is reported as "*largely responsible*" for her fatal paralyzing stroke. In 1913, she predicted, "*Healdsburg always seems like home to me, [I'll] be back permanently, some time.*" Lizzie died in September 1918 in Sonoma; she was laid to rest in Oak Mound Cemetery.

Sources:

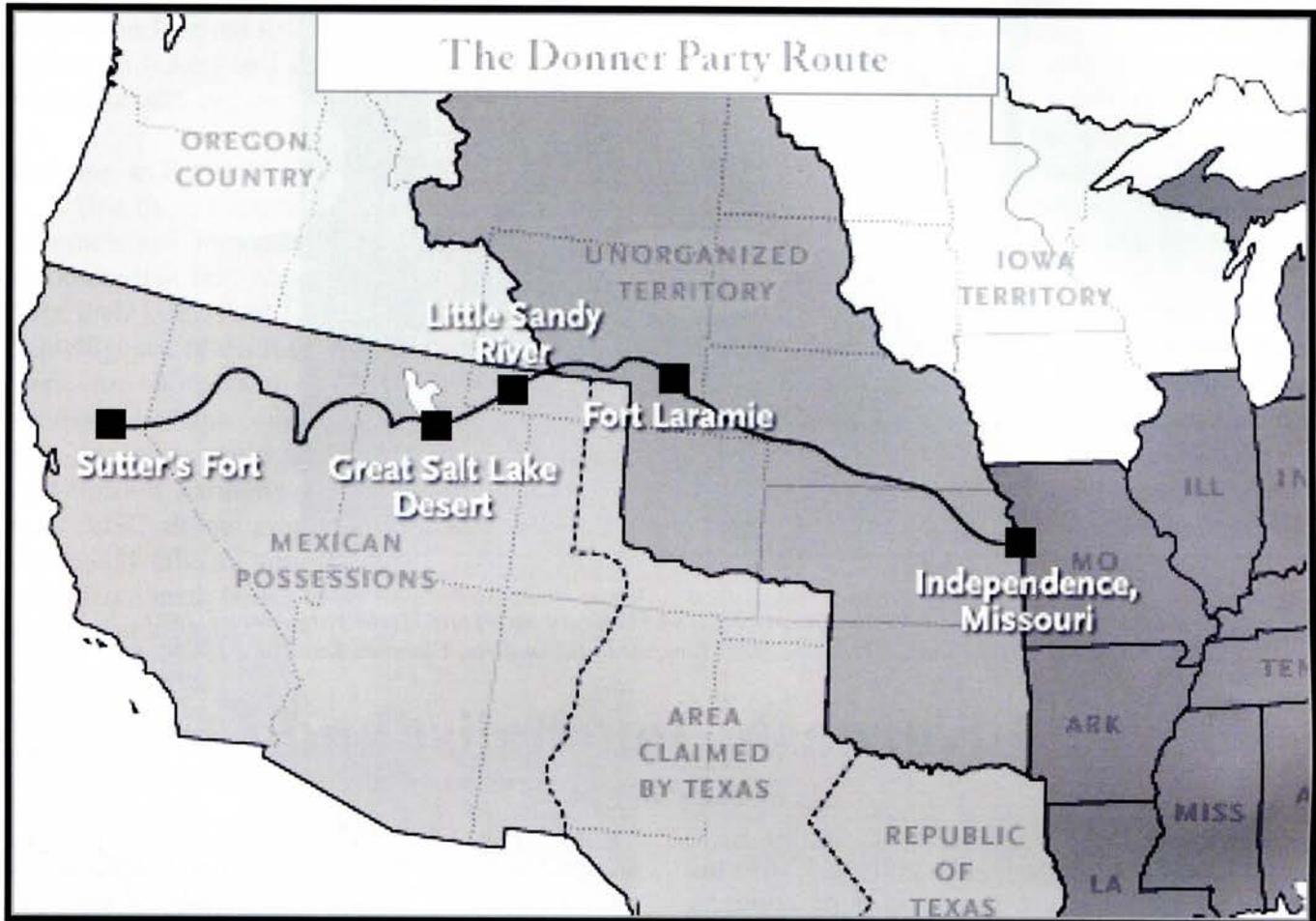
Healdsburg Enterprise, April, 1891; October, 1893; January, 1898.

Healdsburg Tribune, January, 1898; May, 1920.

Healdsburg Tribune, Healdsburg Enterprise, various, 1890 to 1920.

Sonoma County Tribune, March, 1893.

US Census, Family Data, 1890.



Source: SpartacusEducational.com

The Donner Party Route

Donner Party Survivor: A Firsthand Account

by William C. Graves

The following is a personal narrative by W. C. Graves, who now [1877] resides with his family at Pine Flat, 16 miles northeast of Healdsburg. Mr. Graves is one of the survivors of the Donner horror, and through this narrative the public will be enabled to gain the true story of all that occurred to the unfortunate company. We know Mr. Graves personally and that his integrity is unimpeachable. He writes conscientiously and fearless of consequences. We commend his contribution as being well and interestingly written; it cannot fail to interest the general reader. -Ed. Flag

Published in the Russian River Flag in four installments: April 26, May 3, 10, 17, 1877

Crossing the Plains in '46—Personal Narrative of Thrilling Adventure; Encounter With Indians—Tragedies in the Train—Snow Bound—Frozen—Starved

On the twelfth of April, 1846, my father, Franklin Ward Graves, started, with his family, consisting of my mother, and Sarah, Mary Ann, myself, Eleanor, Lavina, Nancy, Jonathan, Franklin

and Elizabeth, the latter only about nine months old, from Marshall County, Illinois, to come to California. My oldest sister, Sarah, had been married to Jay Fosdick a few weeks before we started; he and a hired man by the name of John Snider completed our company from that place till we got to St. Joseph, Missouri, where we joined a large party, some bound for Oregon and some for

California. This was about the 25th of May. We crossed the river, called a meeting and elected a Captain and other officers, such as we deemed necessary in crossing the Great Plains.



Source: J.D. Larimore

William Cooper Graves

First Excitement in Camp

On the evening of the fourth day, I, with four or five others, was detailed to stand guard the forepart of the night, over our cattle while they grazed on the prairie. We were marched out by the sergeant of the guard, placed in a circle around the cattle and ordered to keep the stock in and the Indians out. About 9 o'clock a fire started from some cause unknown to me, in the prairie grass about a half mile to the north. The wind was in the west, and blew the flames so that they passed in a streak. In a few minutes I saw a man coming in a full run toward me. I recognized him to be my nearest neighbor guard, but to play the veteran, I yelled at him, "Who comes there?" He answered, in a low tone, "friend." "Friend, advance and give the countersign," to which he said, "Don't talk so loud; hain't you seen them?" "Seen what," said I. "Why, the Indians; they are setting the prairie on fire, and are going to surround and kill us and take our stock. Let's go to camp and give the alarm."

I must confess that I had begun to "tremble in my boots," but I feigned brave, and asked, "Where are the Indians?" "Why there, running along by the fire; there are hundreds of them." Then I saw how he was deceived. In that country there is a resin weed that grows in bunches to the height of four or five feet and on a dark night like that we could see those weeds standing up between us and the fire, and the wind was blowing the flames along; but it appeared to him that the weeds were Indians running the other way. When I explained to him, he was satisfied; but in a few minutes we heard uproar at camp. A little while longer brought nearly the whole company out armed and equipped to fight — what? Why the resin weeds. Two of the guard on the other side of the cattle had seen the same Indians that my neighbor had, and rushed into camp without looking back, and gave the alarm. But they did not hear the last of the resin weed Indians for some time. My neighbor persuaded me to not tell on him, so they never found out that he had seen any Indians. I did not know the exact number in the company at that time, but there were about 85 wagons, and I think would average about five persons to the wagon; about half were women and children.

Attacked by Indians—Two Men Killed

After we left the resin weed Indians, we got along smoothly till within about fifty miles of Scott's Bluffs; here we found some real Pawnee Indians, or they found us, and stole some of our cattle and killed two men. One of them, Wm. Trimble, left a wife and two or three children. She and some of her relatives turned back because they lost so many of their cattle, and we never heard any more of them. At Scott's Bluffs we met a party of Mormons who had been in California and did not like it and were then returning to Illinois. We got to Fort Laramie on the third of July and stayed there till the fifth, celebrating the Fourth by giving the Indians a few presents. From here on to Fort Bridger we did not pay much attention to company: my father's three wagons, Mr. Daniel's one and Mr. McCracken's one left the rest and pushed to the South Pass; there we left them, for they talked of going to Oregon and we were bound for California. With our three wagons we went on to Fort Bridger; here we heard of—

Another Murder

There was a German in our company by the name of Woulfinger, who had a wife, two yoke of oxen and a wagon, which was all that we knew of, but it was rumored that he had considerable money. One day he was driving in the rear; his wife, being on foot, kept along in company with the other women. Our oxen being so poor and weak it was necessary for all to walk that were able to do so. Another German by the name of Keisburg stayed behind with him; they traveled so slow they got out of sight, but we thought nothing of it till night and they did not come; and we became a little alarmed about their safety. So two of the men and myself mounted horses and started back after them, but we had gone but a little ways till we met Keisburg, and he said Woulfinger would be along soon, so we turned back. But as he did not come the next morning, two of the company and myself again went back and in about five miles found the wagon in the road. The oxen had been unhitched from it, but left (two yoke) chained together and were grazing along the Humboldt River bank, not far from the wagon but we could not find Woulfinger. There were no Indian tracks about, nothing but what we supposed to be Keisburg's and Woulfinger's. We hitched the oxen to the wagon and drove them on till we overtook the company and delivered them up to Mrs. Woulfinger. She hired another German by the name of Charles Berger to drive it after that. There was nothing more said about it, but I suppose the reason was because Mrs. Woulfinger did not understand any English at that time, and Keisburg told her what suited him about the case, and she never knew any better; but it was the general supposition that he killed him for his money and threw him into the river.

Nothing particular happened after that till we got to the Truckee River; here we met Stanton, one of the men we had sent after provisions. He had two California Indians with him and five mules packed with flour and jerked beef; he told us to go slow and recruit our teams, so they could pull us over the mountains, for they were very rough; that there was no danger of snow, for others had crossed in midwinter and we could do the same; so we did as he said, and lost five days between there and the mountains, which would have put us over safely had we kept on and not taken his advice. We

afterwards learned that Captain Sutter told him to make haste back and tell us not to lose a moment's time till we got over the mountains, and if the snow did come before we got over to save everything that was eatable for we would have to stay there all winter.

Fatal Accident

One morning we were encamped near where Reno now is; two men, Wm. Foster and Wm. Pike, had agreed to go ahead to Sutter's, get provisions and meet us as far back as possible. Foster was loading a pistol, which was accidentally discharged, shooting Pike in the back and killing him in about twenty minutes; so that put an end to their journey.



Source: Library of Congress, Lawrence & Houseworth, Publ.
Stumps of trees cut by the Donner party in Summit Valley illustrating the height of the snow at the time the trees were cut in 1846

The Place of Horrors

On the 30th of October, 1846, we camped in a pretty little valley about five miles from Donner Lake; that night it snowed about eight inches deep. Now this being the last place that we were all together, and the place where the two Donner families stayed and died, I will give the names of the whole company as near as I can recollect, and also each one's age as near as I can guess.

I will begin with Capt., aged about 50; wife, Tabitha, 44; Leanna, 12; Frances, 8; Georgia Ana, 6; Louisa, 4; Jacob, 50; wife, 45; Saul, 19; William, 14; George, 12; Mary, 10; Patrick, 50; wife, 48;

John, 17; James, 15; about 4 more children. Franklin W. Graves, 57; wife, Elizabeth, 47; Mary Ann, 20; Wm. C. (myself), 18; Eleanor, 15 ; Lavina, 13; Nancy, 9; Jonathan, 7; Franklin, 5; Elizabeth, 1. Jay Fosdick, 23; wife Sarah, 22; Keisburg, 36; wife, 34 ; infant, 1 ; Mrs. Murphy, (widow), 50; William, 17; Landron, 15; Lemuel, 13; Mary, 12; Wm. Foster, 28; Mrs. Foster, 23; Mrs. Pike, 21; Mrs. McCutchen, 24; child, 1; Mr. Eddy, 28; wife, 25; child, 1 ; Mrs. Woulfingier, 23 ; Mrs. Reed, 30; Virginia, 15; James, 12; Mattie Reed, 8; Thomas Reed, 6; Miss Williams, 21; Balis, 24; John Denton, 28; Milton Elliott, 26; Noah James, 20; John Baptist, 23; Charles Berger, 30; Samuel Smith, 25; Mr. Rhinehart, 30; Sam Shoemaker, 25 ; Antonio, Mexican, 23; Mrs. Pike's child, 1. I may have forgotten two or three besides Reed, McCutchen, Stanton, Herron. It seems to me that we made a count near Salt Lake and made the number seventy-four in all, but it could hardly be expected that I could remember so many names for thirty years.



Source: Eliza P. Donner Houghton, "Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate"

Captain George Donner

On the 31st, all but the two Donner families, Mrs. Woulfingier, and three or four of the men who had formerly been Reed's hands, started on to try to cross the Summit. We got about four miles past the lower end of the lake, but could not go any farther because the snow was about four feet deep, and we could not find the road. We were within one mile of

the top, when some were obliged to give it up and go back to the lower end of the Lake, where the snow was not so deep; there was a cabin there that had been built two years before by some emigrants. Mrs. Breen and Mrs. Keisburg took this. Father and Fosdick went about a half mile below, to a thick timber flat, at the outlet of the lake, and built two log cabins, one for us and one for Mrs. Reed. Foster and Eddy built, not far from Breen's, for themselves, the widow Murphy and widow Pike: the latter and Mrs. Foster were Mrs. Murphy's daughters.

Mrs. Reed wanted to make a bargain with father for some cattle to live on, for which she agreed to pay when we got through by giving two for one; father let her have two and Mr. Breen let her have two on these terms. We then butchered our cattle and piled the meat up where it froze and kept good until we consumed it. We had nothing else to eat, then, not even salt to put on our meat. We spread the hides over our shanties, in the place of shingles.

My father was a native of Vermont, near the Green mountains, and had some idea of the snow Mountains. He would not risk the snow going off, but kept trying to get over. About two weeks after we stopped here, the weather was clear and pretty; the snow nearly all gone in the valley, so father proposed trying to cross on foot; about 20 started with him; when they got to the top they found the snow so deep and soft they could not go any further and were obliged to turn back. My father was the only man in the company who had ever seen snow shoes; and upon his return made fifteen pairs.



Source: Wikipedia, Andrew J. Russell, photographer

Summit of the Sierra Nevada, Snow Sheds in the Foreground, Donner Lake in the Distance

He and Stanton, Fosdick and wife, Foster and wife, Mrs. Pike, Mrs. McCutchen, Mr. Eddy, Miss Mary Ann Graves, Wm. Murphy, the two California Indians, and two other men, whom I have forgotten, started on them (Dec. 15), and resolved to go through or die in the attempt. I may say they did both, for some died and some got through, after thirty-two days wallowing through snow, lost and most of the time without anything to eat. Wm. Murphy, however, came back the second day. Mr. Foster, Mr. Eddy, Mrs. Pike, Mrs. Foster, Mrs. Fosdick, Mrs. McCutchen, and Miss Graves got to Johnson's Ranch, on Bear River, and told their story to a few men who lived near there. But here let us return to the camp and see what is going on there.

A few days before Christmas, five men, Jack Donner, Rhineheart, Shoemaker, and Smith Williams died, although they had had all the meat they could eat. But it is a fact (though I think not generally known) that some people cannot subsist on meat alone, while others would not suffer any while they had what meat they wanted. I and a few others did not suffer at all as long as our meat lasted, but it gave out about the fifth of February, and then we had nothing but the hides of our cattle, till relief came, on the 19th of February. We would take a piece of hide, singe the hair off, and then boil until it was tender enough to be eaten. But that kind of living weakened my knees a little.

And now let me state here that up to this time (Feb. 19th) there had not been a word said in my hearing about eating human flesh, and I never thought of it until we got through, and they told us about the first company having to eat it in order to get through, and send relief to those left behind.

On the fourth of January, Mrs. Reed, Mr. Elliott, Eliza Williams, myself and three or four others started to cross the mountains. We went about four miles the first day, and made a fire in a dead pine tree; but did not sleep much that night for it was too cold. In the morning Miss Williams returned to the cabins, but the rest of us pushed ahead to the top of the mountain; there we could see nothing but snow and the tops of pine trees sticking out of it, which discouraged us, and we returned. Beasin [Reason] Tucker, John Rhodes, Daniel Rhodes, Edward Coffeemire, Jackson Foster, Mathew D. Ritchey, George Tucker, Thompson Glover and a sailor, whose name I have forgotten,

started as soon as possible with provisions to relieve us; when they got to the snow they left George Tucker, M. D. Ritchey and Mr. Thompson with the horses, and the other seven men took what provisions they could carry and pushed on, occupying five days to go about forty miles. Mr. Tucker said the men would get tired, sit down, and say "We'll never get there, we had better turn back," but he would say, "We must and shall get there," and start on, and when he was pretty near out of sight they would get up and follow. They arrived about 8 o'clock Saturday night, February 18, 1847, and told us that father and his party all got through alive, but they froze their feet, and were so badly fatigued they could not come back with them. They said they would start back Monday or Tuesday and take all that were able to travel. Mother had four small children who were not able to travel, and she said I would have to stay with them, and get wood to keep them from freezing, I told her I would cut enough wood to last till we could go over and get provisions and come back and relieve them; to which she agreed, and I chopped about two cords.



Source: Findagrave.com

James F. Reed, an originator of the group

A Struggle for Life—Great Disappointment—A Horrible Death—Reaching Camp

Wednesday, Feb. 22, 1847, the relief party and Mrs. Reed, Virginia Reed, James Reed, Eliza

Williams, John Denton, Saul Donner, Win. Donner, George Donner, Jr., Tabitha Donner, Donner, Mrs. Keisburg and child, Mary Murphy, Win. Murphy, Lemuel Murphy, Noah James, myself, Eleanor Graves, Lavina Graves, and two Mexicans, John Baptiste and Antonio—started over the mountains and snow. The relief had left part of their provisions on top of the mountain, thinking to have it on their return and save packing it down and up the mountain; and leaving everything with those behind, made calculations to reach their deposit the first day, which we did, tired and hungry; but, lo and behold! There was nothing there. The fishers (a mountain animal), had torn it down and devoured it, so the “children” had to go to bed without their supper. But the “bed” what do you suppose it was? Soft enough, deep enough and as white as any swan’s down; but no blankets to cover; and we were in that fix for four more days, before we could see bare ground.

The second day, Mrs. Keisburg offered twenty-five dollars and a gold watch to anyone who would carry her child through; but it died that night and was buried the next morning in the snow; about noon, the third day, John Denton got snow-blind, and could not travel, so we had to leave him on the snow, to suffer the worst of deaths. On the fifth day, about ten o’clock, I and some of the stronger, reached camp where the provisions were; but the weaker ones did not get in till night. Wm. Donner ate so much he died the next day about 10 o’clock.

A Second Relief Party—Faithless Woodworth—Feet Frozen and Amputated

When the first party got to Johnson’s and started the first relief to us other settlers there got up a subscription circulated it and got several hundred dollars signed to assist the sufferers, bought clothing, provisions, a keg of fourth-proof brandy and started; about that time Reed and one S. E. Woodworth, of San Francisco, came along, and volunteered to act as Commissary, to which they appointed Woodworth. They went to the first snow; there Reed made a bargain with him that he, Reed, should take nine men: Charles Cady, Patrick Dunn, Hiram Miller, Brit Greenwood, John Turner, Clark, Stone, Jondro Duphansé, McCutchen—loaded with provisions and go over to the cabins, get all of the sufferers and bring them up to the top of the

mountain, arriving there on a set time; Woodworth was to keep three men and follow after, in time to meet Reed on the set day. Reed started into the snow the same day we with the first relief got out.

So you see, Woodworth was at the camp with all these good and fine things; but we knew nothing of them, only we could see that he was drunk. Reed and his men brought Breen’s whole family of ten or twelve persons, my mother, Nancy, Jonathan, Franklin and Elizabeth Graves. Mattie and Thomas Reed, and Mary Donner, up to the top of the mountain, according to agreement, but found no Woodworth there; they stayed that night, the next day and next night; no Woodworth yet, but a heavy storm came on that night, the snow fell about four feet deep, and was so soft they could not travel in it.

Mr. John Stark and family lived on Johnson’s ranch. He had been in the lower part of the State engaged in the Mexican war, during the winter, but returned home a few days after Reed and Woodworth had gone. On learning how things were he started alone to go over and assist in helping us out; when he got to the snow, where Woodworth was, they told him how Reed had done, and how they had agreed to meet Reed on a certain day which had then passed two or three days. Stark then scolded them for not doing as they agreed to and took as much provision as he could carry, and started to meet Reed and company, who by this time had left the sufferers and were making their way out the best they could, after being without food for four or five days, and their feet frozen so bad that some of them lost their toes. Mary Donner’s feet were so badly frozen they had to be cut off; almost every one of us had our feet frozen, but not so bad as hers were.

Soon after Stark started, he met some of Reed’s men, so he followed their tracks and by doing so had but little trouble to find where the sufferers had been left, but my mother and brother Franklin were dead; he carried some of the least, and led some, and helped them all out. Reed had left George Donner and wife and Keisburg in the cabins alive, but Mr. Donner was not able to travel, and his wife would not leave him. Keisburg could come out but would not because he knew Donner had considerable money and he wanted to stay there till they died so he could get it.



Source: Bancroft Library

Lewis Keisburg, "The Cannibal of Donner Pass"

A Third Relief

When Stark got his party out, three or four men started after Mrs. Donner and Keisburg, supposing Mr. Donner would be dead. When they got to the cabins they found Keisburg had flayed Mrs. Donner, and had some of her flesh and blood cooked, and was eating of them; they thought he killed her to get her money, because he had been to her camp and got it and hid it in a tree; they asked him about the money, but he denied knowing anything about it; then they put a rope around his neck and choked him awhile, and then told him if he did not tell, they would hang him outright; whereupon he told them to take his track, follow it to a dead tree and look on the north side between the back and trunk, and find it; they did so and found the money as he stated. They then helped him out of the mountains to Sutter's Fort; when they got there, one of the men, Coffeemire, who helped him out, told the people he thought Keisburg killed Mrs. Donner. Keisburg went to Esq. Sinclay, and sued him for defamation of character.

Settlement of the Trial for Slander—Faithless Woodworth—Bear Valley Camp—Arrival in the Valley

The case of Coffeemire was tried before a jury, who decided that he should pay Kiesburg one dollar for his character and Kiesburg should pay the cost of the suit. Woodworth was the cause of my mother's and brother's death and of very great suffering. Aside from his eating up the provisions that were donated to us he sold all the clothing he could, put the money in his pocket, and did not give us anything that he could sell; and then he had the audacity to write a description of how he suffered at our party and had it published in the "Annals of San Francisco." which was as bad as Munchausen's or Gulliver's big stories. The camp where Woodworth and the provisions were, was Bear Valley, not far from where Dutch Flat is now located. There were about two feet of snow there, but the first relief party had shoveled it away from the ground in a circle of about twenty feet in diameter and then cut and spread down small pine boughs for us to sleep on, which was an improvement on the five previous nights. They had packed supplies to this camp on horses and mules and then took the animals back some twenty miles to grass. We stayed at Bear Valley Camp two days, then went on to where the horses were; here was the main rendezvous. A man by the name of Kern, a Vaquero, and partner of Woodworth, reigned supreme, and gave us a benefit, by making some wild Indians drunk and allowing them to have a war dance. But, you say, where was the benefit? It was in giving the liquor all to the Indians and their keeping us from sleeping more than half the night. The Indians got some shirts there, too, but I don't know how; only I am satisfied they did not steal them. However, they needed them worse than we did, for they were entirely naked, and we were not quite.

From here we were taken on horseback to Johnson's ranch, the first settlement in California; here we were left to look out for ourselves, but the people were very kind to us and we got along very well; but our flesh swelled up as if we had been stung all over by bees, and it was equally as sore. Our only flour at that time was wheat, ground in a common coffee mill. Beef was very cheap; we could buy a quarter of a full grown bullock for a dollar.

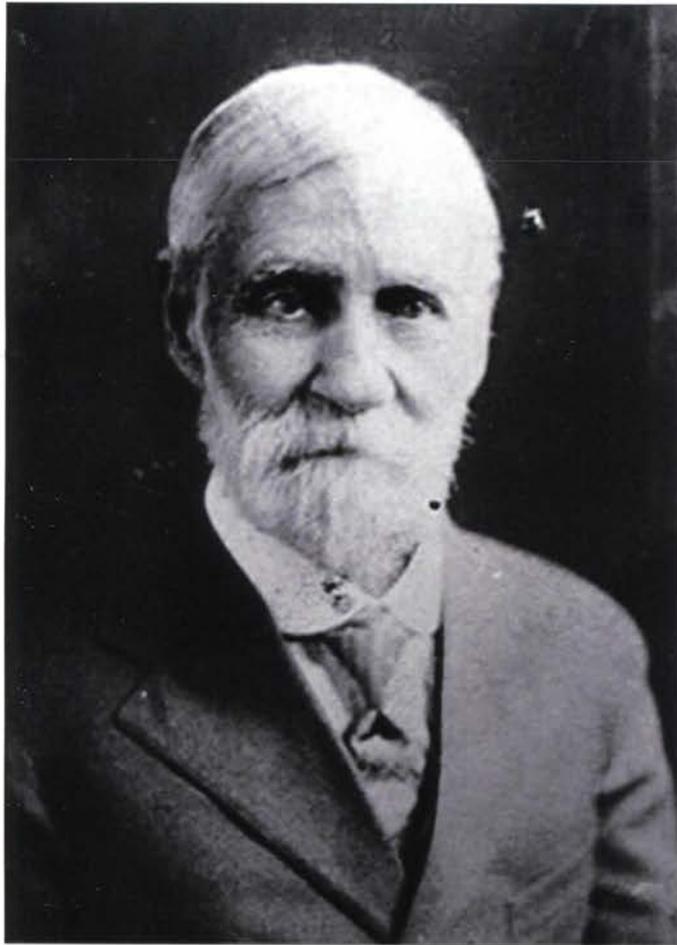
But now I have finished all that will be of interest to the general reader.

Dr. Merritt Gardener Kellogg

by Whitney Hopkins

A pioneer in the Seventh Day Adventist faith, Merritt Gardener Kellogg was a doctor, a pastor and missionary. Born in Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1832, Kellogg moved with his parents to Battle Creek, Michigan, where they embraced the religious ideals of the fledgling Adventist faith.

Though Adventists did not officially organize as a church until 1863, Adventist roots go back at least to the early 1800s and the Millerites who believed Jesus Christ's "second advent" (second coming to earth) would take place in 1844. When the second coming did not take place, many Millerites were disillusioned and gave up the belief; others continued to study the scriptures.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection
Merritt Gardener Kellogg

It was over the next 15 years that some former Millerites continued to meet and synthesize their beliefs, which included that Christ's second coming is imminent, and that the seventh day, Saturday, is God's Sabbath. In 1860, they settled on the name "Seventh-day Adventist," and in 1863 officially organized as a church.

Kellogg early embraced the religious ideals of the Adventist church. He married Louisa Rawson in 1854, and they made the westward journey to California in 1859, where they were probably the first Seventh-day Adventists in the state. Kellogg gave Bible lectures in San Francisco, where he converted a small number of people to the Adventist faith. He traveled to New Jersey in 1867 to take a course in medicine at Trall's Hygieo-Thereapeutic College. During his return journey to California he attended the Seventh-day Adventists' General Conference session on 1868 and asked that the church send evangelists to the West Coast.

In 1877, Kellogg was working at a San Francisco hydrotherapy center. The owner opened a retreat in Rutherford, in the Napa Valley, where Kellogg then went to work. At this time, he was encouraged to open his own health resort, and began one in St. Helena. The Rural Health Retreat, known today as St. Helena Hospital, was an immediate success. Kellogg left after other trained doctors arrived.

In 1893, Kellogg traveled on a ship as a medical missionary through the South Pacific to Australia, stopping at various islands to treat sick people. He lived in Australia for some time, where he married Eleanor Nolan in 1895, following the death of his first wife. There Kellogg designed and oversaw the construction of a sanitarium in Sydney, now known as the Sydney Adventist Hospital.

Kellogg and his family returned to California in 1903 due to his poor health. The family lived at 721 Brown Street in Healdsburg until Kellogg died in 1921.

Source:
Seventh-day Adventist file, Healdsburg Museum



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection
Effie Robinson, 1965

A Strong Social Intelligence: An Interview with Effie Robinson

by Holly Hoods

I had the privilege of interviewing Effie Robinson at her home in the Marina District of San Francisco in March, 2001. We became friends. This transcription about her upbringing and early life in Healdsburg is excerpted from that interview.

Born in Healdsburg in 1920, Effie Robinson attended elementary school and high school in Healdsburg. She attended Santa Rosa Junior College and then moved from Sonoma County to attend San Francisco State University, from which she graduated with honors in 1942. Effie attended the University of California School of Social Welfare as a Rosenberg scholar and graduated with a Masters in Social Welfare in 1945. She was the first black person to receive a degree in Social Welfare from the University of California, Berkeley. In 1945, Effie joined the Family and Children's Agency (later named the Family Service Agency) as a casework supervisor. She became Acting Director of the Family Service Agency in 1956. In 1961, the San Francisco Examiner included her on its list of Ten Most Distinguished Women in San Francisco. After almost 20 years with the Family Service Agency, Effie was appointed to join the San Francisco Housing Authority as Director of Human Relations and Tenant Services in 1964. She was the first woman to hold an executive position with the San Francisco Housing Authority. In 1967, she was named to the Advisory Committee to Human Rights Commission and as an advisor to the Curriculum Committee of the San Francisco Board of Education. In 1973, she became Director of Senior Programs and Social Services. Effie died at her home in San Francisco on May 23, 2003.

Southern Roots

I am the daughter of Jesse C. Robinson and Elzora (Harper) Robinson. My parents were married December 26, 1901 in Georgia. I really don't know anything about their early life together. I just know that the immediate social conditions before they left the state were racial unrest and rioting, so they decided that they would leave Georgia. People have asked, "Why did they settle in Northern California?" They came with a family named "Gordon" and the Gordon family settled in the East Bay. Coming from a rural community in Georgia, my parents wanted to live in the country.



Source: Genny Bayan

Jesse C. and Elzora (Harper) Robinson

The family moved first to [Perris] Southern California, then later to Fort Bragg and eventually relocated to Healdsburg in 1919. My father had had experience, of course, working on small farms and he worked for a few people in Healdsburg, including the [Francis and Elsie] Passalacquas. I don't know how many years it took for [Jesse] to get settled in the golf links [as groundskeeper at Tayman Park Golf Course]. It seemed like a natural transition for a person who liked to work out of doors.

Only Black Family in Town

In our family, there was an older sister who drowned up near Eureka. Then there was Mattie Irene who came with [my parents] to Healdsburg, then a brother Smitty [Smith], then James, Kathleen,

then a sister Elizabeth who we called Betty and then me, Effie; then Genevieve, who died when she was a senior in high school.

I was the first one of our family born in Healdsburg. I was born in 1920. I believe I was the first black child born in Healdsburg. Dr. Stone was the physician. We were the only black family in town when I was growing up.

When I was young, I was closest to my brother James. He was kind of a mentor to me and was interested in my progress. He taught me speed reading. My brother James was in the Marines. He finished San Francisco State College. He studied teaching. In those days a black student could not practice teaching in San Francisco yet. So he had to go down past Los Angeles to practice teach in the Imperial Valley to do his student training. And that's where he met his wife. He had to teach down there for a while and then he was able to get into the San Francisco System. She was a graduate of UC Berkeley and [because of her race] couldn't do practice teaching in the Bay Area. Isn't that horrible?

My sister Kathleen worked in San Francisco for a family for a while, but she went to San Francisco State and got a teaching credential. By then it was possible to do teacher training. Kathleen was also a community educator.

James was the second black principal [in the San Francisco School System]. Mr. Cobb was first. Kathleen was the second black teacher in the system. My sister Betty worked for Recreation and Parks and married a minister at Community Baptist Church. When my brother Smitty led the [Healdsburg Federated] church choir, his choir would travel to sing in the church every year and the Baptist choir would come to Healdsburg.

My oldest sister Mattie married Reverend Wildy of the East Bay and she had a career as a religious educator in northern California. She was an excellent speaker.

Our house was small, but well kept. Our family had to get along well and share a lot of space. There was a bedroom off the living room, a bedroom next to the dining room and then a room beyond that.

There was always music in our house. James played the piano. I have always appreciated music, though not at the performance level. I told

myself when I retired that I would indulge myself in subscription tickets so I go to the symphony season, the opera season and the ballet.

Education as Route to a Better Life

One thing I remember about my parents was the tremendous importance of education to them. They knew that this was the main route to a better life for their kids. And I have been so impressed by the intelligence of each in different directions. My father, for a person who had very limited education—perhaps only sixth grade or around there—my father could do math in his head. And he taught himself harmony. When my brother James was at USC doing graduate work in music, my father could talk to him about it. And he taught himself from math books to do math himself.



Source: Genny Bayan

Robinson family in front of their house at 414 Grant St, 1950s

My mother was intelligent also, but she demonstrated strong social intelligence, in the community, being part of it; helping her kids be a part of it; and helping her kids associate with everybody. And my mother had the most incredible kind of self confidence. I remember one time we were in Golden Gate Park looking at the pretty flowers and there was a small party of diplomats there. My mother was talking to the head of the delegation and she said, “Oh, I wish you could see my garden in Healdsburg!” And he loved it! He just loved it!

We picked this up from her, because my father did not have this confidence in dealing with a broad range of people. He was happy and felt safe with his church. He was not a community person like she was. He was authoritative at home—not authoritarian—but authoritative. He was “the Father.” He was clear and interested, but he was not a broad community person.

Besides education and studying, there was great, great importance put upon behavior. I don’t ever remember my parents explicitly saying, “Because you are black and would stand out in this community...” but certainly I got that message and that we had a responsibility to behave. Another thing I don’t ever remember is my parents saying that we should not talk to, or associate with, any particular person. I remember a boy who was my age, in my class, who was considered a “bad boy.” But my mother didn’t treat him as a pariah at all. She saw him as someone who needed help and as someone who needed love. After school she just kind of took over—and she already had seven kids of her own! Her attention to him and faith in him paid off, because he grew up to be a respected citizen—a fireman who we knew later in his life. But that was the kind of person she was. And she also taught a Sunday school class.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

Smith Robinson with mother Elzora in their home, 1954

Importance of Church

My mother was sort of known as a mother in the church, a pillar of the church. And even when

times were really bad, such as when [her son] Smitty was dying...she would still go on Sunday morning because it was part of her strength. All of us went with her to the Baptist Church. My father went to the Pentecostal Church, but again this was where he had greater comfort. They were so fond of him! He had the same attachments there that we had at the Baptist Church. But when we became adolescents we went to the Federated Church, which was Presbyterian and Methodist combined [today Healdsburg Community Church]. We went there because we seemed to have more in common with the young people, with our peers there. Smitty later became the director of the choir.



Source: Genny Bayan

Jesse and Elzora Robinson with their children, spouses and grandchildren

My parents were very ecumenical, especially for their time. Many of our friends were Catholic and I remember especially the Giomettis. Our parents would let us go to Catholic Church, to special ceremonies with them, such as 12:00 Mass, which I think for Protestants brought up in the South it was a very open attitude to let your kids experience. Some people at the time were so afraid of people becoming Catholic, but we were allowed to. This started my interest in and knowledge about Italian culture, which has been a lifelong interest. I try to visit Italy every year! I felt very close to Italians. Mrs. Giometti taught me to cook. I remember standing up on a chair in her kitchen

stirring sauces. And I learned a lot about opera from the Passalacquas. One of the Passalacquas—one who worked in the bank—[Enrico] was a famous tenor.

My parents, especially my mother, fostered an interest in learning about other people as long as you could maintain what you were. And that's a good thing to teach kids. They also prepared us for the possibility of name calling and discrimination. They taught us not to fight or capitulate, but to report any incidents to the teacher.

I always knew I would move out of town. What I always thought was even more phenomenal was that the [white] people in Healdsburg didn't expect us to stay here and do domestic work. They *expected* us to attend college (even though a lot of them didn't). And I think that's amazing!

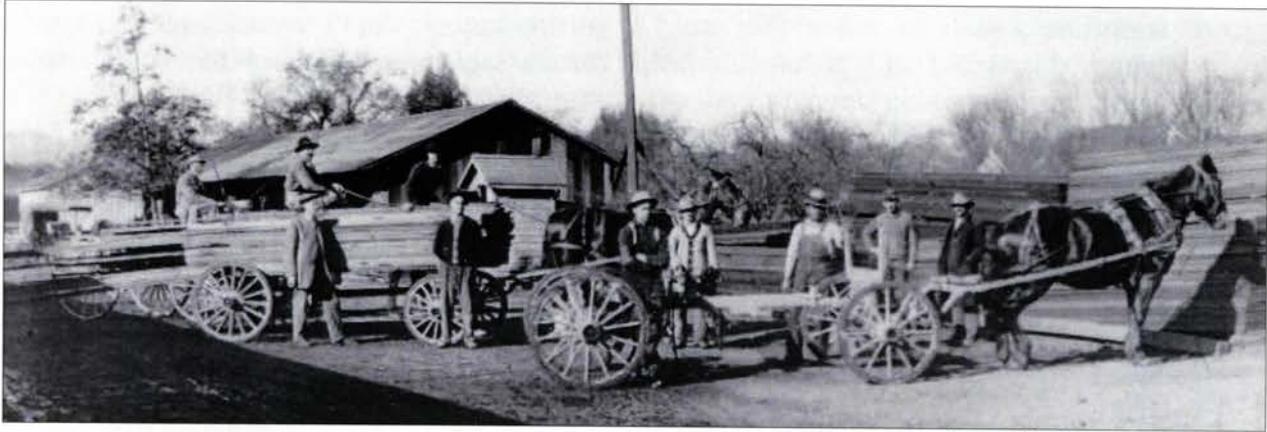


Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection
Elzora Robinson, 1965

I think one of the most wonderful experiences I had was in my mother's later years. My sister Kathleen and I would alternate weekends, making sure that she was ok. My mother and I became even stronger friends. I didn't have a car, but I would rent a cab and she and I would go for a ride around Fitch Mountain. We would pretend that we were looking for houses to buy. And we had such a wonderful friendship for years before she died. And it was an unusual experience because most kids go farther away. So I am so pleased that I had the opportunity to appreciate her even more.

She lived until 93.

My father lived 'til his late 80s.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

A.F. Stevens Lumber Company, 1908.

The Early History of Healdsburg Lumber Co.

by Eric Ziedrich as told to Gabriel A. Fraire

Eric and Janet Ziedrich purchased Healdsburg Lumber Company in January of 1985 from Eric's father, David William Ziedrich. On April 19, 2016, Gabriel A. Fraire interviewed Eric at the Healdsburg Lumber Company. The following article is a result of that interview.

Let's start back in 1876. The best I can tell this was the year of the initial development of this area of town. The rail finally arrived in Healdsburg and the depot was built. The Roma building on the corner of Front and Hudson Streets was built in 1876 and Healdsburg Mill and Lumber Company was opened at the present location of Healdsburg Lumber Company.

I'm not sure if there was a rail spur coming into the lumberyard at that time but at some point it was brought in. Prior to the rail line, all lumber and materials were transported around the lumberyard with horses and wagons.

From the pieces I have been able to put together, it appears that the yard burned down around 1907.

After the fire, A.F. Stevens, who was connected with Haywood Lumber out of San Francisco, purchased the remaining assets. He rebuilt a few buildings and in the beginning of 1908 opened for business as A.F. Stevens Lumber Company.

I have some of Stevens' original journals and the first journal line entries were for a horse, a wagon and a safe.

Stevens was an entrepreneur and a very ambitious fellow. He expanded operations and

opened lumberyards in Geyserville, Cloverdale and Lakeport. He did all this over a period of about 20 years.

In addition to the lumberyard, Stevens also was elected to the California assembly and was appointed a district judge.

In the early '30s Stevens had a massive heart attack and his son, Russ Stevens, took over the business. Russ ran the business until the early '60s.

Russ married a reputedly high-society young lady, Cleone, from Lafayette. They built a lovely home in Healdsburg, at the end of Tucker Street across from the park. It's a mid-century modern house built in the '50s. It included the first swimming pool in Healdsburg.

A local painter, Mike McCaffrey, was a yard boy for Stevens in the late '50s and early '60s. He shared some interesting stories about the Stevens' life in Healdsburg during that time. He said the Stevenses liked to throw parties, and San Francisco high society would come up to visit Healdsburg. A lot of alcohol was consumed and clothing may have been optional near the pool.

Russ was very active in Kiwanis. He was the district governor and he also traveled a lot. He even traveled as far as Russia and when he came back he gave a presentation on his experiences.

Russ retired in approximately 1963. At this point, there is a void in our understanding of the company history. Soon after he retired from the lumberyard, the shingle changed out front from A. F. Stevens Lumber Company to Pacific Lumber Company. Pacific Lumber Company was the largest redwood producer in the world. However, we have never been able to determine how they obtained ownership from the Stevens family. At this point, we probably never will.

What may have occurred is that Pacific Lumber was a supplier for A.F. Stevens and probably financed Russ's lumberyard. That's one theory. Pacific Lumber financed the place, left Russ to operate it and the day he retired, that was it – a change in name.

When Pacific Lumber was in charge, the yard was supervised by Gunnar Johnson and Pacific Lumber integrated the Stevens' yards into their retail lumber division.

I wanted to know more about the details of the change from Stevens to Pacific Lumber. I approached the Pacific Lumber Museum Curator and asked for details on how A.F. Stevens was acquired. They declined to provide any details.

Later on, I met a gentleman who lived on Fitch Mountain Road. He was good friends with the Stevens family. I told him my theory on how the company evolved. He contacted a niece of Cleone, up in Oregon, an elderly lady, and asked about the lumberyard ownership transfer. Her only response was, "Let sleeping dogs lie." So the mystery continues.

The Healdsburg yard operated under Gunnar's direction from 1963 until 1972.

Meanwhile, the Ziedrich family was living in the San Mateo area. My father went to work in the construction industry shortly after the end of WWII. He learned the construction business, joined the carpenters' union, went through the apprentice program and became a building contractor in San Mateo.

Mother was a nurse. In 1963, my father decided to get out of the Bay Area. I think he saw a photo of Sonoma County in *Sunset* magazine. Next thing I know we're coming up on a road trip. I remember stopping in Coddington Mall when it was brand new.

We found a home in Rincon Valley. It was a big gamble. Ma got a job at Memorial Hospital and Pops hung out a shingle as a general contractor. I was in elementary school. I loved it here. Santa Rosa had a population of about 35,000 and the population was skyrocketing. Rincon Valley elementary was overcrowded. We had to go to school in shifts. I didn't start school until 1 p.m. I went from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Every day started off like it was Saturday.

Over the next ten years my father, thanks in part to my mother's connections, developed a lot of good relationships building custom homes for doctors and other professionals in the health industry. He even secured jobs with Dr. Ed Neal and Dr. Nick Grace. My father built the doctors' office on Center Street in Healdsburg and he built the doctors' homes off Mill Creek Road.

As my dad was building those projects, he developed a relationship with Pacific Lumber's Gunnar Johnson. This would have been around 1971-72.

Dale Zobel and Gunnar worked inside the small store. Bill Stewart and Paul Englehart worked the yard. Betty Hayes, wife of Reverend Bill Hayes, was the bookkeeper.

One day Dad said to Gunnar that he would love to get into a small business like the lumberyard. Gunnar said he thought Pacific would love to sell it.

Over the next year my folks liquidated most of their assets. Dad took the year off and began repairing and rebuilding the lumberyard facility, long before escrow closed on the sale. I was 16-17 years old and assisted him on the weekends, painting and replacing the roof. Ultimately working with Ray Talvola, the treasurer of Pacific Lumber, dad structured a deal and eventually bought the entire inventory and outdated equipment for what seemed to be a huge sum at the time – roughly \$375,000. He retained all five of the existing staff.

That was the start of the lumberyard and the Ziedrich family. Dad changed the name to Healdsburg Lumber Company. Coincidentally there was already a Healdsburg Lumber Company that had operated where Safeway is currently located, but had been closed for quite a while. They contested the name but since they hadn't filed a fictitious name statement and we had, our name stuck.

At one point I was the delivery department for the yard. I worked the lumberyard Tuesday and Thursday and all day Saturday. One day I was making a delivery of 60 sheets of 1/8 inch Masonite. It was smooth, tempered and very slick. I was at Fitch and Powell Streets and turned left. Right before the high school I jerked the clutch and all 60 sheets slid out of the truck. And when they hit they just didn't plop down; they slid out like a deck of cards all along Powell Ave. I had to quickly reload the whole truck myself. (I knew then that I wouldn't make a great truck driver.)

I could not wait to disappear and do something other than the lumberyard. For one thing, my dad was a real taskmaster. He was also a disciplinarian and very structured.

I was a scrappy little kid. I always worked fast and pushed hard probably because my dad used to say, "I don't care if it's right or wrong, just do something!"

I did my best to load lumber for customers and do whatever needed doing. One day I was working the plywood shed with a regular customer who was kind of demanding. I was really trying to impress him. Then we finally stopped and he said, "You want to go to work for me, Kid? I guarantee I'll pay you more than the guy who owns this place will pay you." That guy was Jerry Eddinger. I was flattered, but I kept working here.

My dad grew the business and expanded the staff. There were, of course, economic cycles during the twelve years that he ran it.

In 1979 through '81 there was a big recession and all the businesses were struggling. Still, he and my mother managed to put all four of their children through college. I earned a degree in finance. I had tried law school for a year, but didn't like it (and it didn't like me.) I ended up working as a financial analyst for Wells Fargo Bank in San Francisco and Janet worked for Bank of America as a marketing analyst.

My wife Janet and I moved from San Francisco to Petaluma which had the only housing that we could afford and still be within commuting distance to San Francisco. Commuting to the city wasn't great, but what else could we do? Janet became pregnant with our first daughter, Jill. We realized then that it would be extremely difficult to

raise a family while we were both commuting to San Francisco.

I began exploring the possibility of becoming an independent financial consultant or something like that. I happened to be talking with my dad and he said he was trying to sell the yard. I said, "Having your own business, especially in Healdsburg, was a dream. I think a lot of people would give anything to be in your shoes."

I said, "Why don't you hang onto it?"

Then he said, "If you think it's so great, why don't you buy it?"

In short order I quit the bank.

My dad and I had a very specific employment contract, expectations, timing, all the essentials. He said if I liked the business and he thought I could do it I would have an option to buy the business in two years with a clause to buy the real estate within ten.

I took a salary cut to come up here. With some arm twisting, I convinced Janet we should buy a house in Healdsburg. She reluctantly agreed and in 1984 we purchased a home on Bianca Lane. Janet continued to commute to San Francisco until we had our second daughter, Amy

In 1983, I was working with Dad in this closet-sized office. He began teaching me the hardware and lumber business. I understood the business side, but had a huge amount to learn on the lumber and hardware side.

It wasn't easy working together side by side. One day I just sat down with my dad and I said, "Dad, I think that I get this. Why don't you take some more time off and I'll scream when I need help." With his extra time off, he managed to build a beautiful new home on Los Amigos Road.

Apparently, he was confident enough that I was catching on. In January of 1985, Janet and I bought the lumberyard.

As I reflect back, when I started here, I knew just enough to be dangerous and came in with a cocky attitude, combined with an ambition to grow the business. We have endured many peaks and valleys during the last 30 years. Thank goodness our staff here has been great. They are a hardworking, committed and loyal team. They have hung on through thick and thin, supported us and allowed us to build the business together. It hasn't been easy, but man, has it been a fun ride.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

J.S. Tucker's Basket Making Store on North Side of Plaza Street, John and Mary Tucker are standing together in front of the open doorway, September 4, 1889.

The “Blind Tuckers” of Tucker Street

by Lauren Carriere

John S. Tucker was born in Illinois in 1842. He came to California in a covered wagon and eventually settled in Healdsburg in 1874.

Around that time, John started losing his sight and eventually lost his sight completely. He ended up attending the California School for the Blind in Berkeley in approximately 1872.

It was at the California School for the Blind that John met Mary McMahn, his first wife. Mary was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Her early years were not easy; she was orphaned and began losing her eyesight early in life. At the age of fourteen, Mary moved with her relatives to the United States.

John and Mary were married in Healdsburg on May 31, 1874. They opened up a variety store together on Powell [Plaza] Street between West Street [Healdsburg Avenue] and Center Street. Their

merchandise included toys, dolls, stationery, books, candies and nuts. They also sold baskets, handmade by John, who was an excellent basket weaver.

While they were not able to see, John and Mary were able to run the store by themselves. They knew where everything was located in the store and were able to exchange money by the weight and feel of the coins. The Tuckers became a loved and respected couple in Healdsburg. The community affectionately nicknamed the couple the “Blind Tuckers.” They were often seen taking Sunday strolls together. John used a buggy whip to guide himself and his wife through the various surfaces in town.

When Mary died of cancer in 1906, a poem was written about her and her husband in the *Healdsburg Enterprise*: “together they linked their fortunes for the pathway of life without the light of

the sunshine but with hearts light with love and a strong determination and will to make of life light out of love."

Mary's funeral was held at St. John's Catholic Church in Healdsburg. She was buried in Oak Mound Cemetery.

Two years after the death of his first wife, John met and married Margaret Mary Wissing. She was a San Francisco native of German descent, born in 1871. They met through an introduction by a member of her family.

Although many newspapers continued to refer to John and Margaret Mary as the "Blind Tuckers," Margaret Mary was not blind. They lived a calm, retired life at 411 Tucker Street until John died in 1932 at the age of 91. He is buried in Oak Mound Cemetery.

John's headstone reads, "*Be square with the world when you leave it for the future. Wait and Hope.*"

Margaret Mary joined him in death in 1955. She, too, is buried in Oak Mound Cemetery.

Sources:

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Healdsburg Tribune, February 29, 1940.

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Russian River Flag, March 26, 1874; June 4, 1874; June 18, 1874; October 28, 1875.

Sotoyome Scimitar, December 22, 1932.



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