

EARLY HISTORY OF LIVE OAK

by Kathleen Briick

The town of Live Oak in Sutter County now is 100 years old. It is located on State Highway 99, about 10 miles north of Yuba City, with the Feather River running parallel to the highway about half a mile east of the town.

Before the coming of the railroad--about Christmastime, 1869--all the ranches were along the Feather River or near to water holes in the area. Early farming was done on bare land, where winter storm-water stood and prevented the growth of trees and brush. This was the cheapest way to farm until, acre by acre, the dense forests were cleared and the lands could be cultivated. Many Chinese laborers were employed in the clearing process. Transportation before the building of the railroad was by river-boat, horse and wagon, or on horseback.

A. M. McGrew, who came with his brother, J. W. McGrew, to California in 1861, is credited with building the first home in Live Oak in 1869. This home is now owned and occupied by Mrs. George F. Pierce (nee Addie Channon) whose parents were Mr. and Mrs. John Channon. They bought the house from the McGrews after A. M. McGrew, who had built it for his expected bride, left town when the marriage did not work out. He left the details of disposing the house to his brother.

Records show that A. M. McGrew had purchased the processory claims of several "squatters" who were encamped in the

area. In 1868 he established his claim on the Live Oak townsite. (The land already was clear because of its swampy condition in wet winters.)

Some of the reports say that the house across from the Live Oak Justice Court on Fir Street was built in 1866 by C. E. Wilkinson. This house has been remodeled and is still in use.

According to the Southern Pacific Public Relations Department, in 1865 the California and Oregon Railroad, a Southern Pacific ancestor, incorporated to build from Marysville, California, to Portland, Oregon. In 1869, about Christmas, trains operated to Live Oak. This was the date chosen by Live Oak residents as the beginning of the town of Live Oak. So Live Oak really began to exist as a town by the first of the year 1870. Other towns along the railroad are marking the century also, with Gridley and Biggs planning centennial celebrations.

It took 12 years for the completion of the line to Ashland, Oregon, where the "last spike" ceremony was staged on December 17, 1887. Financial troubles as well as the hard work of laying the rails made the process slow. This year of 1887 the Southern Pacific took over and completed the Oregon and California Railroad, linking Portland and all points on the Southern Pacific system. The Santa Fe and the Southern Pacific, in a fierce rate war, slashed passenger fares from Missouri River to the West Coast to as little as \$1.00.

The first siding was built in Live Oak in July of 1874 and at the same time a warehouse was built by C. E. Wilkinson. L. J. Heenan now owns and operates the warehouse business just north of the site of the first warehouse. The original building came down a few years ago. On March 2, 1876 the station was built.

The first move toward building a town came with the opening of a store near the tract of the Oregon Division of the Central Pacific Railroad by H. L. Gregory on June 1, 1874. Gregory was also the first Postmaster with the post office in his store, which was on the north side of Pennington Road between the Southern Pacific and Sacramento Northern tracks. This was in August. The business was later moved to a location on Broadway at Fir Streets, in the red brick building now occupied by Wilson Hardware.

That fall two or three houses, a blacksmith shop and a saloon were built. Two mails were received each day. There were two passenger and two freight trains each way daily. A Wells Fargo Co. Express was located here March 15, 1879. Considerable grain and wool were shipped by train from this point. By 1879 the town consisted of one warehouse, two stores, one saloon, one hotel, two blacksmith shops, one Chinese washhouse, one school house, one hall, and about twenty-five dwellings.

The first Methodist Episcopal Church was built in 1885 on the site where later the Sacramento Northern Depot stood and which now is a city park. The former church is now located

near the corner of Elm and L Streets and has been remodeled into a four-unit apartment, house. Before the building of the first church, services were held in the schoolhouse. religious services were held every Sunday by the circuit preacher of the Yuba City Circuit of the M. E. Church. Ministers of other denominations occasionally preached in the schoolhouse. One of the first ministers was Rev. E. Kellogg of Yuba City.

A Sunday School was started by Mrs. John White and Albert Davis in 1875 and in 1879 there were 40 pupils under the leadership of Rev. R. P. Wooley.

The city's first telephone manager was W. H. Stafford, Sr., but he had no phones in 1895 to supervise. There were no phones in Live Oak until 1899. The first one was listed under the name of Cutts and Hudson Ranch, with the number "Main 1." Stafford had listed two more customers by 1901 and finally became established in the telephone business in 1905 with 26 subscribers. By 1909 when F. A. Hedger took over as the community's telephone manager, there were 87 stations.

The Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company is expected to spend \$273,000 in Live Oak on construction projects in 1970, with \$212,000 of this total going toward conduit, cable and poles, \$22,000 for telephones and \$39,000 for central office switching equipment. (Hopefully, Live Oak subscribers will be able to dial Marysville and Yuba City, toll free this year.)

The first school was located at the "four corners," Pennington and Township Roads, on August 7, 2865, on property

belonging to A. H. White. It was later moved into the town of Live Oak near the Gregory store. The two-story school was built in 1886 on the site of the Dowd Furniture Store, which recently opened on Highway 99. In 1923 the brick structure which houses the furniture store was built. J. C. King was one of the first teachers. H. H. Hewitt, father of Lloyd Hewitt, former Sutter County district attorney, was an early-day teacher at the school. This was known as the Clay school district until the name was changed to the Live Oak school district in 1920. Encinal School district had been the "Live Oak" school district prior to that time.

The Live Oak Union High School opened September 20, 1920, in the Broadway Building of Mrs. George A. Burrington. T. C. Smith and J. F. Luther gave without charge the use of their large garage building for manual training and auto mechanics. Prior to this time high school students had attended classes in Sutter or Marysville. The cornerstone for the high school building was laid on June 4, 1921. The new building was occupied February 24, 1922, and the following April 19, the Grand Lodge, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, under the auspices of North Butte Lodge No. 267, dedicated the new building.

The Live Oak schools were unified in the summer of 1965. The buildings now include: Luther School, grades kindergarten through fourth; Live Oak School, grades five through eighth; and Live Oak High School, grades nine through twelfth.

The Live Oak Odd Fellows Hall on Broadway has had a long and colorful history. The first Sutter County records, April 22, 1878, (Book 0, Page 69) refer to the older section of the brick building as being built by James Gilbert. The upper story of the two-story building was sold to the Live Oak Hall Association on April 22, 1878, with James Galbreath, Arch M. McGrew and Hezekiah Luther as trustees.

The structure was used for public gatherings in the area for programs, parties and dances. There were other large wood-frame halls in town previous to this time. Live Oak was the center of social life of the area, since the only highways leading in or out were Larkin Road, Township Road and Pennington Road and these were dirt roads.

North Butte Lodge No. 267, I. O. O. F., moved into the building on May 25, 1911. The lodge, which met every week and paid \$5.00 for each month's rent, purchased the building on October 15, 1913. Blue Bell Rebekah Lodge No. 344 was instituted on November 24, 1913. Both lodges have met continuously since their institution. North Butte Lodge added the new lodge hall in 1927 with store space downstairs and lodge rooms upstairs. The old hall was remodeled for a banquet room and kitchen.

The Live Oak Women's Club was organized on May 28, 1912, in Fraternity Hall. Mrs. W. T. Francis was the first president. The Hall Association donated the hall for the first three meetings. Seventeen members responded to roll call on October of

1912. There were 31 names listed on the charter. On February 3, 1914, the lot for the club house was purchased for \$150.00. In February 1917 the first part of the building was built. On April 10, 1924, the executive board outlined details for the second part of the club house.

From 1917 to 1938 the Sutter County Library, Live Oak Branch, was housed in the Women's Club building. Mrs. Addie Stafford (Mrs. W. H. Sr.) and Mrs. Anna Bigelow gave of their time to help run the library. At first members of the club alternately had charge of the library. The library was moved from the club house to the Odd Fellows hall in September 1938. W. Bradbury Barber donated the present library building on Highway 99.

The first drug store was opened by Dr. and Mrs. Irving W. Higgins, March 6, 1913. They stayed in Live Oak for 35 years.

The Golden Valley Walnut Association was first organized in Linden in 1928-29. In 1930 the new plant was built in Live Oak.

The State Highway was constructed through Live Oak to the Butte County line in December of 1915. This highway followed the railroad all the way up the Sacramento Valley, going through each town. The new "Highway 99" coming up the Sacramento Valley is winding its way, trying to miss each town.

Larkin Road was paved in 1928. The first streets were paved in Live Oak in 1922.

Gas was brought to Live Oak in the spring of 1927 and natural gas from the Buttes Oil Field has been used in Live Oak since the fall of 1938.

In 1909 Live Oak had its first electricity.

In 1907 the Sutter-Butte Canal Company constructed a canal, for the purpose of irrigation, about a mile east of Live Oak. The water was taken out of the Feather River a few miles northeast of Live Oak.

In 1908 some of the larger farms in the surrounding community were subdivided into tracts from a few acres to fifty acres. These sections were known as Sunset and Live Oak colonies, No. 1 and No. 2.

Mr. and Mrs. F. E. Thayer were the first to purchase a tract of land after the subdividing was started in 1908.

The Sacramento-Northern railroad was built through Live Oak in 1906. At first the train ran only from Chico to Marysville. A flagman lived in a tent near where the Sacramento-Northern railroad crossed the Southern Pacific track about a mile north of Live Oak to signal trains through the crossing. In 1910 a tower was built at the crossing. The first two tower men were W. F. Bigelow and W. H. Wilson.

The high water and flood of 1907 were disastrous for Live Oak because it had been built in a low, swampy area. A sheet of water stood in the town, with water up to the level of store counter tops. As many of the homes had been built on the higher land surrounding the town, they escaped the flood. The new

Sacramento-Northern railroad embankment near the slough at the Ernest Briick ranch two miles south of town was washed away but the bridge itself stood firm. The Briick home was high and dry, as were all of the ranch houses in the area. Since this was a grain raising area with very few trees by this time, one could see the farm houses, all out of the water, in the distance.

Before the levee systems were built, water covered the valley during the heavy winter storms and then the people would take refuge in the Sutter Buttes. In 1862 three fourths of all the live stock drowned.

Seasons of 1866-67 were very wet. Grizzly bear, antelope, elk and deer, beaver and many other small animals were plentiful, making the trapping and hunting good.

Live Oak had many lodges and clubs formed as the population increased. North Butte Lodge Independent Order of Odd Fellows, ranking as the oldest, was organized December 12, 1877, at Pennington and transferred to Live Oak on May 2, 1911. Blue Bell Rebekah Lodge was instituted November 24, 1913. The Modern Woodmen was organized in 1908 with N. F. Todd as First Consul. The Royal Neighbors of America, Fern Leaf Camp, was organized in 1909 with Estella Ricketts as the Oracle. The Live Oak Grange No. 494 was organized August 5, 1932, with M. T. Galbreath as the first Master. The Live Oak Rod and Gun Club was formed in 1935. The Live Oak Farm Bureau was first started

in Live Oak in 1916 with Ed Boyington as director. The Live Oak Parent-Teacher's Association was organized in 1922 with Mrs. Ralph Wiser as the first president. Oak Leaf Parlor Native Daughters of the Golden West was organized on March 7, 1946. Mrs. Anna Bigelow was the first president.

The city of Live Oak was incorporated by vote on January 14, 1947, with a population of 1,200 residents. This was the second attempt to incorporate. In 1926 the vote had ended in a tie of 148 to 148.

## EARLY HISTORY OF LIVE OAK IN PICTURES

The following pictures are in this order:

1. ONE OF THE FIRST homes in Live Oak was built by A. M. McGrew in 1869. When John Channon found the house was for sale, he put his young daughter, Addie, on her bicycle, gave her \$400 in cash and sent her to buy the place. The Channons moved in soon and Mr. and Mrs. Channon remained there the rest of their lives. Addie, now widow of George F. Pierce, still lives there with a daughter. The Pierces were married September 20, 19064 in Marysville. They moved into the home which is across the street from the Presbyterian church.

2. FIRST SCHOOLHOUSE in Live Oak was at Pennington and Township Roads, built in 1865 on the A. H. White property. It later was moved into the town. The two-story building pictured was put up in 1886.

3. GRADUATES OF LIVE OAK Grammar School in 1902 were as follows: (Left to right, front row) Addie Channon Pierce, Lela Boyington Luther, Annabell McGrew Schidler; (middle row) Murray Johnson, Gladys Starr Poole, L. L. Freeman (teacher), Annie Siefert Eager; (back row) Walter Cutts, Fred Drew, Ada Hedger Lewis, James M. Hampton, Jr., Paul Miller.

4. LIVE OAK WOMEN'S CLUB was organized May 28, 1912, in Fraternity Hall, with Mrs. W. T. Francis as president. On the charter roll were 31 names. Picture shows a 1913 club meeting in the clubhouse erected in 1917. "Younger generation" indicates no baby-sitters in those days.





