

# SUTTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## NEWS BULLETIN

Vol. 2 No. 5

Yuba City, California

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Early day Freighter carrying freight to La Porte, on the La Porte Road

PROGRAM  
SUTTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
JANUARY 20, 1959 - 7:30 P.M.  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS CHAMBERS

Glen Price - Director of Westerner Foundation Association  
with College of Pacific He was formerly with  
the California Beach and Park Department

Topic: Jedediah Smith and his  
Explorations

Dr. Coke Wood of College of Pacific will also be a guest

DR. JOSEPH A. MCGOWAN'S SPEECH  
To The  
Sutter County Historical Society

The technician rushed up with a screw driver, grabbed the speaker and announced, "our speaker has the screws." It was embarrassing, but everything meant well.

A very serious mistake was made this evening. I am a teacher of history at the State College, and it's legendary that whenever a college teacher stands up, he talks for fifty minutes - you can't stop him, it's just automatic. However, I wrote it down so that wouldn't happen and I won't go near that length of time, And I would like to apologize for one more thing, I obtained some bi-focals lately and I'm never sure what I'm reading or what I'm looking at, so if I stumble around a little bit, it's not because of lack of preparation, it's because of these infernal things I have on my face.

It is a real pleasure to come here and talk to people who are interested in history, especially, in this age of materialism when the first question that is asked is "what is it worth?" What good is it going to do you?" "How much can you get out of it?" We find this of course, especially, in college where no one anymore ever majors in what we call Liberal Arts Program, they are all going to be teachers or business administrators or their whole college program is somehow orientated toward increasing their income. So to be able to talk to a group of people who are interested in something for the simple reason that it is interesting and for no other reason is a real pleasure and a real joy. And I think that possibly it indicates a higher level of sophistication than we can find in our materialistic society because as anyone will tell you, what can you do with history besides teach it. Well, this involves a two hour lecture that we won't go into at the present time.

The subject for tonight that I thought might be interesting to you, was the operations of the pack trains out of Marysville in the early 1850's. As a matter of fact, of all the towns in California that pass under the title of "Mule Town," Marysville is the one town, as you know, that had as many mules as it had people. This was in the 1850's of course, around four or five thousand, and literally tens of thousands of pack boats of mules left Marysville every year for the mountains. However, before we get into this description of this activity, I would like to point out the problem that caused the pack mule to become so important. During the gold rush, 100,000 people came to California, roughly speaking. California had a population of 10,000 in 1848 and it had well over 100,000 by the end of 1849. And none of these people came to California for any other reason than to mine gold. In other words, there was no planning or preparation for the way these people were to be fed or to be supplied with clothing or anything else. To try to draw a modern parallel to this situation, the closest I could come is to try to imagine what would happen if the United States Army dropped five divisions of soldiers on the coast of China without any plans for feeding them, clothing or moving them. What happened in California was worse. China is only five or six thousand miles away. California was 17,000 miles away from the east coast by the lines of transportation, that is around the Horn. This gives you some idea of the fantastic problem that was involved. California's population increased 1,000% in two years. We are still overwhelmed by the 43 or 53% increase we had between 1940 and 1950. Well, the result was of course, a tremendous set of problems which Californians worked out in the two decades between 1850 and 1870. One of these problems concerned transportation. These people went into the mines, and they planned to stay there yet they had not brought enough food to last six weeks.

The only answer to the problem had to be a fantastic development of transportation, first by steamboats up the Sacramento, and then by smaller steamboats up to Marysville and then on backs of mules into the mines, because there were no roads and there were no wagons and there were no horses broken to pulling wagons. Horses and wagons were unable to be of much use in the mining towns, until hydraulic mining and quartz mining had vocalized the population so that it paid to build a road there. Otherwise, if you tried to build a road to one of these placer mining towns it wouldn't be there by the time the road arrived. So the practical solution to this whole problems was the use of the one type of transportation that was present in California on a plentiful scale at this time, this was the pack mule - the Mexican pack mule. He didn't need any road to travel. He was a small animal, and could carry two or three hundred pounds on his back. And so in the beginning, the pack mule was literally the pulse of civilization so far as this area was concerned. There are roughly three main pack routes out of Marysville, one went out by Browns Valley, Dobbins, and Oregon House, Camptonville and up to Downieville, and this is the one I will be speaking mostly about because I was able to get statistics on this that I wasn't able to get on the other routes. The other route, the second of importance, went up to LaPort, and the third went up by what is now Central House, up past what is now the site of Oroville, and then up the road to Bucks Ranch and that region. These were the three main pack trails out of Marysville. And then of course, there were further pack trails from these towns to smaller places near by. How many pack trains went out? Well, I have a few extracts from the newspapers. One day in February in 1853, pack trains left Marysville daily. On August 6, 1854, three hundred mules carrying 40 lbs. - 40 tons, left Marysville for the mines. On another

date 77 on one date. By a series of rather extended statistical correlations, I was able to determine that between the first of April and the first of November over 10,000 pack boats went into Downieville every year. This is not 10,000 pack mules because they made three or four trips each, but this is 10,000 pack boats carrying approximately 1,000 tons. It is no wonder then of course that the modern highways follow the old pack trains. I don't suppose they could get out of the rut. Now this was the only place I was able to develop statistics that seemed at all probable. This meant two pack trains a day of about 30 mules arriving in Downieville. Put on that basis, it doesn't sound like too much. In the beginning, of course, it was a very expensive process - a dollar a pound and in the rainy season a dollar a pound. But then as more mules became available and as the goods of civilization became fairly common in the mines the price dropped to around six cents a pound.

While I've been talking about mules, you people up here may know about mules, but I have found in the past that most people that I have talked to don't know about mules, they think they are jackasses, or something of this nature. So just in case there are any "city slickers" here who haven't seen a mule, let me explain that a mule is a hybrid, that it is a cross between donkey and a horse, and in other words, it is about the size of a horse but it has the ears of a jackass. But it is a hybrid, and being a hybrid it cannot reproduce itself, which led, of course, to many interesting comments in the diaries of New Englanders who had never heard of a mule before. One of them for example, wrote home in his letter "they have neither pride in their ancestry or hope of posterity," which is rather a delicate way to point that mules cannot reproduce. However, the mules lived to a fantastic age. Mules of thirty to thirty five years of age were still working eight or ten hours a day so that once the supply had been built up there wasn't any great problem of trying to re-supply them. But the age of the mule became legendary, no one knew how old these mules were in California, and so the editor of the North San Juan Hydraulic Press had this to write, quote, "the Bible didn't have anything to say about the mule and there is no reliable account of his invention. We saw one the other day branded on the left hip B.C." The mule had many advantages over a horse, first of all a horse has to have good feed. There are innumerable records in California to the affect that the mules would eat the bark off the trees. In fact, one man wrote in his diary that when the mules heard them cutting down the trees, they began to hee haw and stampede for their dinner. And secondly, of course, horses have to be watered quite frequently, mules only once a day. Horses are more subject to disease, mules more resistant, and so on. Of course, the mules have certain disadvantages, they have very small hooves for example, they sunk very easily in the snow and the ice and they had a disposition that will more or less show, I think, periodically through this talk. Nevertheless, they were remarkable animals. They were not the big Missouri Mule we think of now. They were the small Mexican pack mule. And so one person wrote in his letter home that they are sure-footed, long-enduring little Mexican mules and they unwearily carry their packs along unprecipitous trails that were scarcely distinguishable down mountain sides sliding without braced feet and swimming cold streams. Of course, this was written by a man who admired the mules, but frequently you would find a letter or a diary of a man who had been mule-handled, if you know mules you know what I mean. So this other man wrote in his letter, quote "Mules are ill-begotten and illegitimate, conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity, and God never made them nor any law to govern them." Well, maybe he was being carried away by the events of the moment.

A pack train usually consisted of 25 to 40 mules but sometimes they had up to 100 mules in one of these pack trains with one muleteer to each fifteen mules and these mules could carry fantastic loads. The most interesting, I'm sorry to say the most interesting load, the one that always fascinates me, was the pack mule that was loaded in Marysville with the billiard table. They put a fifty pound sack of flour on each side of the mule's back because the back of a mule is sort of pointed. To get a platform, they put a billiard table on the mule's back and put one person on each end so that it wouldn't get scratched and then they packed that billiard table up on Buck's Ranch and then down to Rich Bar on the North Fork of the Feather River at a charge of \$450 in gold dust, payable on arrival. The man in the diary, McElvaney's diary, stated that the operator made back the cost of the transportation in 24 hours charging a dollar a game for billiards - so maybe it worked out. But there were other loads - there was the load of 365 pounds of sea gull eggs, they weren't exactly sea gulls, but they were gathered on the Farallon Islands and they were a sea bird egg not a chicken egg, packed in lime and put on the back of a mule in Marysville and packed into Downieville as a Christmas surprise. The price on that was \$1.00 a pound per package. The heaviest load that I found was a six hundred pound milestone carried on the backs of one of these little mules.

They carried printing presses into the mountains and I have two records of where they carried pianos into the mountains. Now they weren't the baby grand piano that we think of today, but the rather small piano and of course you know the houses they were destined for. But Downieville got one and Weaverville got one. But there were two things however, that you didn't put on the back of a mule, one was a loaf of bread and the other was crockery or mirrors of any kind, because those of you who know mules, know that they have this very rugged gait that would shake a loaf of bread into crumbs in twelve to fourteen hours and would just reduce mirrors into broken glass. So until wagons could enter the mountains, the largest mirrors they had were just hand mirrors, because these were all that could be moved in on the back of a mule. Every pack train seemed to be loaded with cigars and liquor. I remember the time for example that, I think it was in Downieville, it might have been Weaverville, we were snowed in for some time and the citizens got out and shoveled for four days to shovel a path for the pack train to get in and the first pack train was loaded with gin, whiskey and cigars. It was discouraging but they expressed themselves in no uncertain terms, but nevertheless, the comment after comment was about the tremendous amount of traffic in these things. This plus the fact that in the winter time the trails had big holes in them and the mules were apt to sink out of sight led J. Ross Brown to make this comment in his book. He was talking about what is now Highway 50. Should any future traveler be overtaken by thirst and see a pair of ears growing out of the road, he will be safe in digging there for underneath stands a mule and on the back of that mule is a barrel of whiskey. Well, its an exaggeration but it carried the point.

Who handled these pack trains? The first ones were the Mexicans, the Mexican Muleteer, and as you know, we had Mr. Bousies from LaPorte who operated one of the first trains out of Marysville. Here is a quotation from a New Englander: "The Spanish Muleteer upheld their name as the best Muleteer in the world. When a mule was mired down they would strip to the skin, dive unhesitatingly into the mud, knife in hand and cut away the loads and saddles, then ropes would be attached to the mules and they would be dragged out. The Mexican Muleteer gave a lot of local color to the area with their serapes and sombreros and their rifle and lasso and knife". They were the packers. Well, packing was an art. They had a pack saddle called an Aparajo. All it was, well ordinarily you think of a pack saddle as the cross bars that we see today. The Aparajo looked like two cushions from a sofa joined together by a leather strap. They are about eight inches thick filled with willow sticks and straw. They weighed about 65 or 70 pounds and they were held on the mules back by this huge strap or broad

strap about eight inches in diameter. I saw some of the Aparajos up in Downieville. Some of you may know Mr. Lavazola up there. He had some of these and demonstrated the art of packing to me one day in November on some saw horses, he didn't have any mules at present. Well, when you had to pack a saddle without any cross trees to tie your rope around, you can see the art that would have to develop. First of all you had to make each side of the saddle even in weight because it was believed that if there was a variation of more than five or ten pounds, that this would be enough to throw a mule off his balance when he was coming down a thirty or forty degree grade or on a trail only eighteen inches wide with a cliff on one side and solid rock on the other. And so they packed the mule from both sides at the same time keeping the weight fairly even. The Mexicans, of course, were experts, on the packing of the mule. The New Englanders and the Englishman who had never seen a mule before had no idea of the depths of deceit that a mule could sink to. And so I quote this from the diary of a man who was the same man who was mule-handled by the way, as I packed my animals, first of all he didn't realize that when a mule is going to be packed he takes a big breath and expands his chest and holds it till the cinch is tightened then he relaxes and everything is nice and comfortable except that the pack saddle will turn underneath in about five minutes. So back to the quotation then, "I packed my animals and put all the tinware on top, I gently adjusted the pack saddle as I didn't want to cinch him to tightly. Suddenly my mule shook himself with a vigor that originated with his nose and vibrated like an earthquake to his stiffened tail. He turned the entire saddle load in tinware under his belly then jumping stiff-legged a few bounds, he commenced kicking, and away went the battered pans amid clouds of flour. I hung onto the halter until the mule stood up on his hind legs and boxed out at my head with his front hooves. The next day I tied the mules head in a bag and hobbled both fore and hind feet in preparation for packing. But a Missourian took these off and put the saddle on the mules back and put his foot against the mules ribs and then threw his whole weight backwards and pulled until the cinch rings met. The mule raised his fore legs and quietly submitted". The next quotation is from an Englishman, you can almost hear his accent, Lord Dunraven, no less. He was through Marysville and had some very interesting comments to make on the packing trade and the hotels outside Marysville, and I quote, At each jerk, the wretched mule expels an agonized grunt and snaps at the men's shoulders. The men haul with a will squeezing the poor creatures diaphragm most terribly. Smaller and more wasp-like grows his waist. At last not another inch of line can be got in and the line is made fast. The unfortunate beast has assumed the appearance of an hour glass, large at each end and exceedingly small at the middle. The apparent sufferings of that mule arising from undue compression of his digestive apparatus are pitiful to behold, but it is all a fake. The heart of a mule is completely deceitful and in an hours time that pack will require tightening again. So we have the mule packed and on the trail and we leave Marysville. Originally, there was a bell mare which might have been a light colored mule, sometimes it was even a light colored horse. It was a trained animal and around its neck it carried a bell. The bell served as a two-fold purpose. First, to warn any other pack train that there was a pack train coming and they had well to mind rules of the road-such as a loaded train or an up-train had the right-of-way the same as automobiles on narrow roads in the mountains today. And then secondly, the bells served to establish a tempo for the team so they went along at a pretty bouncy rate and pulled together very well. The Muleteers, being somewhat of Spanish temperament and somewhat excitable, called out in such terms as "hippa, mula, caramba, Dona Maria" and many other choice terms found in many diaries. One quotation said they swore, shouted and beat their mules, kicked them, pulled

them and pushed them and swore again and when these efforts failed they resorted to prayer and meditation. But at least they got the mules into the mountains. They averaged from sixteen to eighteen miles a day and then at night when the lead mule went off the trail, all the other mules lined up in a circle, stood by and they unpacked the mule and the mule went off and rolled in the dirt, they hobbled the bell mare and all the other mule stayed around automatically. Then in the morning each mule went to his own pack train, he was packed and then stood there until loaded and off they went again. There were many hazards of course, some of the trails by actual measurement were 18 inches wide with a cliff two or three hundred feet down on each side. If it wasn't a cliff it was a very steep slope, and a rather abrupt rise on the other. A mule frequently fell off some of these trails and if it wasn't a precipitous drop the mule was rarely hurt unless it hit its head on the way down because this heavy pack saddle protected its rib casing and its spine. The only incident, I found several cases where pack mules fell off the trails and only one of them was hurt and he was carrying a load of dynamite. As we pointed out, the loaded train had the right-of-way, and everyone who has handled mules swore that the mules knew this because when they were loaded they kept coming and no one could stop them and the other ones got out of the way as fast as they could.

I have this small account of people trying to come over the Sierras; there were twelve horseman, I think, and so they sent one of their number ahead to look and see if there was a pack train coming, then if not, he would wave his hand and they would all dash to the pull-out then they could go to the next way around the mountain when they got caught, and I quote, "The mules were upon us before we could turn, some of us were overturned, horses and all, in the banks of snow. Others sprang from their horses and let them struggle on their account. All had to break away out of the trail, the mules were stampeded and kicked and brayed and rolled by turn. The Vicaros were in a perfect frenzy with rage and terror combined, shrieking, 'Maladatta, Caramba, Caratta'. Bridles were fouled around their legs and jerked their owners on their backs, lassooly were twisted and wound around mules and horses and whiskey barrel packs went rolling hither and there, men and animals kicked for their bare lives. Heads, bodies and legs were covered up with snow drifts. The scene would have been amusing if it had not been intensified by the eminent risk of slipping over the precipice. It was at least 1,000 feet down to the valley and a man might as well be kicked by 12 frantic horses and 25 vicious mules as undertake a trip down there by the short cut. Other obstacles that they faced, of course, was crossing streams. There were no bridges, they made them as they needed them. They cut a tree so that it fell across a river. Sometimes they took some of the branches off, sometimes they didn't. The only problem was to get the bell mare to cross. The bell mare was a pretty intelligent animal, but if they could push her onto this log she would put her nose down and go across without any trouble, logs that men fell off of because they would get dizzy watching the roaring stream below in the spring freshes. There is one other example, for instance, when they came to the top of a slope 50 or 60 feet that was icy in the morning, the bell mare took one look and shook her head - she wasn't going down that slope for anybody, so they stopped and took the whole pack train out of her sight and pushed the bell mare over. She curled up her legs and skidded right down to the bottom, got up, shook herself, and began looking for something to eat. Then they brought the rest of the train up and they looked over and saw the pack train and then voluntarily each one went down by himself. So the bell mare

was an important factor. The crossing of streams on logs two feet thick was very difficult of course, at times. On one occasion, a mule carrying iron fell off one of these logs and immediately three of the muleteers dove in the stream, one supported the pack load on each side of her and they got the mule ashore. There were steep trails with forty percent grade for example, originally going down the ridge to Downieville. A mule carrying three or four hundred pounds on its back trying to go down that grade had a very difficult thing to do. But in a sense, in many senses, it was worth it. Especially the first pack train in the spring. As you know, the miners had no outside contact with the world between the first of November and roughly the first of April they were snowed in. During this period they neither had fresh fruit or fresh vegetables and frequently scurvy broke out. One of the best cures for scurvy was onions, and this explains for example, the onion valleys to be found throughout the Sierras. And so the first pack trains in always took a load of onions, sometimes several. There was always a race to see which pack train would get in there first. According to Shirley's letters, she was on the Rich Bar of the North Fork. The men used to watch the ridge waiting to see the dust of the first pack train or hear the jangle of the first bells and then she wrote, "as soon as the men saw the dust of the pack train coming up the trail, they would make a grand stampede for it and fight for onions, paying a dollar a piece for them". It was profitable to be the first train in and these pack mule operators were entrepreneurs and they fought to be the first ones in because of the great profits out of it. One of them for example, when he got into the mountains, traveled only between one and five o'clock in the morning when the snow was hard enough to hold the mules up, they went to that extreme. Another description of the pack train; on it came, first like a row of ants, creeping down the hillside, then nearer till the clatter of the hooves and the rattling of the packs could be heard. Then the blowing of the tired mules and then at last the leader, an old gray mule came staggering along heavily packed. The return trip, of course, was quite the opposite, when, while the mule was loaded, went through all sorts of dramatics to show its displeasure with the situation, on the way back it jaunted along with no trouble and when it got within six or seven miles of Marysville it usually broke because they knew they would have a couple of weeks pasture before they had to go into the mountains again.

Beginning somewhere between 1855 and 1858, the pack mule began to decline in importance. There were several reasons for this. By this time the towns that were located where there was a stable gold supply had been established Nevada City, Grass Valley, Downieville, and so on. I believe in 1858 marks the wagon road going into Downieville whereby wagons could go in and they no longer had to rely on pack trains. Besides, after 1855 the population of the mountains was declining, the gold was running out and most of the supplies had already been brought into the mountains by the pack trains. Today, of course, the pack train has practically disappeared. They use them for recreational purposes, in the high Sierras they use them to pack some timber into some mines, but generally they have given away to the tractor. But it is important, I think, to keep in mind, that at one time in California's history, the pack train represented the pulse of civilization, as far as the miner was concerned, it represented his only connection between the diggings and Marysville, and to him this meant civilization.

THE GILBERT N. SMITH RANCH

1851

by Honora A. Laney

The Gilbert M. Smith Ranch, located on East Butte Road at its juncture with Sanders Road, is another one of the famous sites in Sutter County whose history deserves to be preserved along with that of Hock Farm, home of John Augustus Sutter. The history of the Smith ranch begins early, being first recorded in 1851. On its lands was located one of the first schools of the county; over its wooded pastures roamed California's second poet laureate, and in the middle of its grove of massive oak trees was established the first and largest of the Methodist camp meeting sites in northern California. It was here, too, that Mr. Smith erected a handsome home that was to figure so tragically in his life and in the lives of so many associated with the history of the ranch.

In 1851 the land was settled by three men, one of whom was named Wood. Reference is made in the History of Sutter County by Thompson and West to their early claim to this site, which lay clear of the danger of inundation and was free from the infestation of mosquitoes that made habitation close to the rivers nearly unbearable.

Even in the early 50's the land grabbing fever was running high and settlers were moving away from the more fertile lands by the river to the less productive lands that lay around the base of the Buttes. Among those who saw, not only the possibility of a fair livelihood from this land but the beauty of its setting as well, was a young man named Gilbert Smith, who had looked about for a likely spot to establish a farm. Here at the base of the Buttes, where Sand Creek came foaming out in winter wrath, tumbling among the boulders that lined its narrow bed and frowned upon by the craggy mountain walls rising sharply on either side, he set up a small dwelling that would be his home for twenty years.

Here, then, was the beginning of the Gilbert N. Smith Ranch, a poor beginning indeed, but what was that to a young man with dreams ! The ranch was covered with magnificent white oaks as well as live oaks, the girth of some of these trees being often as much as 24 feet and their crowns towering fifty and sixty feet over their leaf-shaded bases. The land was sandy, too, but there was also good soil which would certainly raise barley. All that needed to be done was to clear the land of the less desirable trees and leave the larger oaks for shade on the hot summer days. And so it was done. Gilbert, although medium sized, wiry and strong, was very, very determined.

The deeds to this ranch, a little less than a section, were granted not only by the United States government but by individuals. Recorded in the Hall of Records of Sutter County were the four separate deeds, three from the General Land Office and one from a Michael Luckerman, recently a private in Captain Stevenson's Company of the First Regiment of New York Volunteers. Three of these grants gave Mr. Smith lands located in section 26 and 27 of Township 16, North, Range 2 East.

As Mr. Smith added to his material possessions, he also gave thought to his spiritual welfare. In the early 1860's, therefore, he granted to the Marysville Circuit of the Methodist Church for 99 years or until no longer desired, the right to use a portion of his land as the site for a religious camp meeting. The Reverend George R. Baker, pastor of the Butte Circuit, raised a subscription in 1862 and undertook the building of a large platform in an especially magnificent grove of oaks that lent itself handsomely to the elevation of spiritual thoughts and peace of mind.

In order to better understand the circuits of the Methodist Church that joined together in the three week camp meetings held annually at this new site called Camp Bethel, it is necessary to know a little of the early local history of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1850, the Feather River Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church, embracing Sutter, Yolo, Yuba and Butte counties was formed," according to information recorded in the History of Sutter County by Thompson and West, "This was the first circuit in northern California. The first quarterly conference was held in Yuba City on June 15, 1850. Then 1855, it was called the Marysville Circuit." Apparently there was another division at this time called the Butte Circuit of which Reverend Baker was pastor. Thompson and West go on to mention that In 1870, the Butte Circuit was divided, cutting off the eastern portion and calling it the Yuba City Circuit." But there were no divisions at the circuits at the camp meetings.

Camp Bethel was the largest and the oldest of the camp meetings in northern California. Families came from near and far to join in the singing of religious hymns, to listen to the inspiring messages of their spiritual leaders, to strengthen their religious organization, to enjoy the fellowship of working together for common goals, and finally to experience the peace of mind and contentment that comes from living close to nature at her finest.

And while nature treated the congregations who attended the camp meetings for spiritual profit kindly, Mr. Smith also enjoyed a kind of profit. According to Historic Spots in California by Hero Eugene Rensch and Ethel Grace Rensch, Mr. and Mrs. Smith dispensed candies and soft drinks to the camp meeting families and when possible even boarded a few. Mrs. Authalena McPherrin, who dates from an early day family and knew Mr. and Mrs. Smith, confirms this information.

Slightly to the east of Camp Bethel, perhaps 300 yards, stood the first Union District School, a small, unpainted building, located in a thick grove of trees. This school, established in 1868, was attended by Henry Meade Bland, destined to become California's second poet laureate - but more of him later as he relates to the local scene. This school functioned for a few short years here and then a new location, about one-half mile below Camp Bethel, was selected on land donated by Mr. E. J. Howard, Here, a more pretentious school was built, enclosed by a wide board fence that boasted a handsome stile. It was here the Smith family as well as the Howard family received their first acquaintance with the three R's. Union District continued to function until 1917 when it closed for lack of sufficient students.

No doubt the Smiths knew Henry Meade Bland well. Not only did he live about a mile south of the Camp Bethel site in a little house under a big oak tree, but his father was a minister on the Butte Circuit in 1869-70 as well. It was this little home that earned the high flown title "Saints' Rest" from Henry's father and it was in this neighborhood that young Henry spent many happy hours. These happy hours he has immortalized in many of his poems that earned him the right to be named poet laureate of California. Again and again, he recalls the sights and sounds of the land here at the base of the Buttes, the blessed shades of the oak on a hot summer day, the sigh of the south wind around the eaves on a cold winter night, the call of the wild goose and the mournful croon of the crane - all came to life through the magic of his words. Through his power to evoke the images of times long past, there is a constant reminder of the beauty of this site so dear to so many long ago.

In this beautiful spot Mr. Smith, then, decided to build a home which would be the pride of the country around. In order to get the necessary funds to erect a domicile worthy of the setting, he sold some of the lands that he had acquired earlier. During the 70's, as attendance at the camp meetings dwindled and finally fell a:my altogether, the lovely site of Camp Bethel reverted to Mr. Smith. For small sums of money (\$500 for one parcel of 80 acres and \$250.00 for another smaller parcel) he began the nucleus for the dream about to become a reality, the Gilbert N. Smith home on East Butte Road. Late in 1879, he commenced the big home which was to become the beginning of his downfall. For many years he had lived in the small home on the point of the hill that formed one side of the mouth of Sand Creek Canyon. This home, though very unpretentious had grown with his family. With his marriage to Mary Thorp, a widow with two daughter, Rachel and Jennie, he thus acquired a family, and as the years rolled by other children increased the fold. To his marriage with Mary came Phoebe and Stephen, who all matured, married and had families of their own. With each addition he had added another room to the house, but, at its best, it was a poor house indeed. At the Camp Bethel site, therefore, he planned his new home, a home that was very like the home of Mr. E. J. Howard, his immediate neighbor, but with a few differences. Mr. Smith planned his home to be one foot square per room larger than Mr. Howard's. Furthermore, the stairway, whose newel post, banister rail and spindles, all of solid walnut had been made in San Francisco and freighted to Yuba City. This graceful stairway ending in a curve at its head, continued to sweep around in a grand balcony effect, the finest in Sutter county. Also, instead of three fireplaces, there would be four. And still more, the parlor must have the new bayed windows lined with tiny, collapsible shutters inside and crowned by a portico on the outside. Yes it was to be a fine home!

The home grew more pretentious with every wagon load of lumber sent out the weary, dusty miles from Marysville. If the head carpenter failed to find a flaw in the lumber, Mr. Smith did and the lumber was summarily rejected and another load ordered to take its place. This head carpenter, apparently, felt that there was no end to Gilbert Smith's pocketbook. He changed the plans and specifications repeatedly, saying, "If you do this, you'll have a better house." Mrs. Earl Slater, daughter of Phoebe Smith Morton, said that she recalled her grandmother's commenting on the costliness of the home and the cranky head carpenter. Mrs. Myrna Pottle Gray, grand daughter of Mary Thorp Smith (her mother was Rachel Thorp Pottle and step daughter of Mr. Smith) stated that Mr. Smith ordered the fixtures for the staircase from San Francisco and

demanded that the finest of matched walnut be used throughout. In fact, everyone who knew about the home agreed that only the finest of materials had gone into it; from foundation to roof peak, nothing was spared as far as expense was concerned.

By 1883, the home was completed. It stood on the west side of East Butte Road, framed in the magnificent panorama of the Buttes, and surrounded by large oaks and stately cottonwoods. Across the road directly in front of the home stood four truly magnificent white oaks that towered sixty feet above their shade encased bases and spread their leafy branches to cover a wide arc about them. The road for a distance of a half mile to the south was lined with oak trees that created a shady tunnel on hot days. To the north, the trees thinned out and ended with another magnificent white oak that matched the four in front of the home. With the addition of oleanders, mulberry trees, orange, and lemon trees, the home was soon nestled in a grove of greenery. A towering tank house adjoined the house on the western *wing*. To the north were added the inevitable woodshed, two fine barns, a granary, a blacksmith shop, and bunkhouse. The blacksmith shop was dwarfed by a giant oak that finally fell in 1915, having been split asunder by a lightning bolt. The mighty mulberry tree that shaded the long, deep horse trough, wherein Father Coleman's altar boys were wont to bathe on the annual altar boy picnics, also added its beauty to the sylvan setting, shading the horses that dozed contentedly beneath its branches.

All in all, it was a showplace, indeed, but its cost had been extreme and it was to prove the undoing of Mr. Smith. He had gone deeply into debt to complete the layout. The waterpipes alone that criss-crossed the ranch, carrying water to outlying pastures and pens, had been installed at a pretty price. Several wells on the ranch added their bit to the original cost. Mr. Smith's home of dreams was to become a house of nightmares. It seemed that Mr. Smith could do nothing right. His next move proved to be a terrible blunder. Although peach orchards were appearing along the banks of the Feather and almond orchards were known to do well along the base of the Buttes, no one had attempted to plant large-scale fruit orchard in the sandy soil of canyons that opened out into the floor of the valley. No one, that is, until Mr. Smith decided to plant a fruit orchard in the mouth of San Creek Canyon. There was no water in the creek during the summer season; the well threw an inadequate stream for irrigation purposes; the soil lacked the proper qualities to assure a healthy fruit tree growth. In other words, the orchard was a horrible mistake. Mr. Smith lost more money—all borrowed. The orchard, stunted by the lack of essential water and rich soil, proved satisfactory only to crows, black gnats, and rattlesnakes. In fact, the crows were fatter, the black gnats thicker and the rattlesnakes bigger than in any other place in Sutter county. They thrived! Mr. Smith was now in desperate straits; foreclosure was imminent!

In 1896, the property, all of it, passed to Mr. Stephen Bokmann, another farmer in Sutter county's Live Oak area. In Book X, page 358, of the Grantor's Index of Sutter County, the following deed is recorded: "Gilbert Smith to Stephen Bokmann: Said party of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of eleven thousand (\$11,000.00) dollars lawful money of the United States of America, deeds to the party of the second part the South one-half of the NE one fourth, and the North one-half of the SE one-fourth of Section twenty seven (27), and the Southwest one-fourth of the S one-half of the NW

one-fourth and the NE one-fourth of Section twenty-six (26), Township 16 North, Range 2 East." Thus, with a stylized set of statistics, a man was bereft of his dreams, his heart sorely broken. To further try his soul, Mary, faithful and firm had passed away; Stephen and Jennie were grown up and married. He, now alone, must find some way to pull himself together and start anew. To do so was not easy, for he was young no longer, and in a few short years he would be dead. He again married, his new wife being Ellen Garcia, and moved up into the North Butte area where he leased a ranch. It was here he died in 1903.

Stephen Bokman never lived in the Gilbert Smith home. Shortly after receiving the ranch, he leased it to John Ainsley, a bachelor at that time (he later married Nellie Brady, sister to Tom Brady), and John lived in the house alone. In 1899 Stephen Bokmann sold the ranch to Honora Burns, a resident of Colusa County. In the Grantor's Index on the seventh (7) day of February, 1899, the following deed was recorded: "this indenture made this seventh day of February, 1899, between Stephen Bokmann of Sutter County and Honora Burns of Colusa County, for and in consideration of \$13,000.00 gold coin of the United States, has granted, bargained, sold, conveyed, and confirmed, and does so do all lots and parcels in Township 16 North, Range 2 East, amounting to 566 acres."

In 1899, Honora Burns and her sons Joseph, and Peter, with his wife Leonore, moved into the big home. Mrs. Burns, widow of Peter Burns, owned extensive properties in Colusa County, properties that had been acquired by her husband in 1852. These she began to sell and, as she did, she reinvested in lands in Sutter County. In 1903, she acquired a home in Yuba City to which she moved after the death of her daughter Regina Claire Burns Drach. Her son Joe had also passed away, the boy to whom the ranch was to pass. Both Joe and Regina had died in the big house, one in the living room and the other in the parlor. The home, therefore, was fraught with bitter memories for Mrs. Burns (a son, Bernard, had passed away just prior to her moving to Sutter County). Since she had purchased a small ranch with an attractive cottage on it in the Nuestro area for her son Peter, she asked her oldest daughter, Roseann, and her husband William Henry Lang, to move onto the ranch and operate it for her. At this time, Mr. Lang was operating a three thousand acre ranch in Colusa County near Leesville. He gave up his lease on this property in 1908 and with his wife and fourteen children, moved to Sutter County. For the first time in its existence, the "big house" (a phrase coined by the oldest son of Assumption and Arthur Coats, young Arthur Junior) was filled to overflowing. All six bedrooms on the second floor were fully occupied. Even the grand balcony, a portion of which was as large as a good-sized room, boasted a bed for the two youngest daughters, Regina Claire and Honora Anita. It was a little walnut bed that had a high, handsome, carved headboard, a smaller footboard and delicate spindles along the sides. An oval walnut table with marble top completed the "bedroom" furnishings. Here these two slept until the oldest girl, Rosemarie, married M. J. Keegan and moved back to Colusa County. The oldest boys, Aloysuis and Gregory were away at school as was Assumption, the next in line, who was getting her teacher's credential. So it was not often that all the family was gathered under one roof, but when it was, the "big house" met the occasion graciously.

Again, however, the home began to exercise its tragic influence. Aloysius, oldest son of Rose Ann and William Henry Lang, became ill and languished, finally passing away in January of 1915. Honora Burns, the grandmother passed away suddenly in June. Both events were accompanied by rather strange manifestations in the "big house," manifestations that startled the family at home who were unaware that these deaths had taken place. From that time on, Anita, the youngest child, became afraid at the "dark at the head of the stairs." It was in this house in 1918 that Peter Burns wished to plan the big home-coming party for his cherished son, Joe Miner, who was returning from World War I on board a troop transport. And even as he sat in its living room making plans with his sister, Rose Ann, the telegram came informing him that Joe had been lost at sea, apparently, washed overboard during the very rough passage. In 1924, Regina Claire passed away in the parlor of the home, adding still further to the sad memories that seemed to be its harvest. No wonder then, that the home began to assume a somber hue to the family that had once filled it with happy confusion.

Financial disaster again began to plague the home. The depression that strapped the farmers in 1922-23 struck an acute blow at Mr. Lang. A warehouse full of dried beans from the harvest in the "Tule" went up in smoke. There was a question of arson; no insurance could be collected. A long investigation by Mr. Lang and others resulted inconclusively. Then the depression of 1929 began the long decline that ended with the loss of the property in 1936. Insufficient funds, poor crops, and worried banks precipitated the final disaster. Ownership of the ranch again changed, the new buyers being Mr. and Mrs. Louis Weichert from the Live Oak area.

The home still stands on East Butte Road facing the east over the still magnificent white oaks that front it. The Buttes still rise in lofty splendor behind it. Many of the original buildings are gone, but the "big house" remains much the same. Perhaps it glooms moodily over the tragedy touching so many associated with its history. Who knows? Even so, the lament of Henry Meade Bland in "Christmas Memory," expressing his intense longing for the home of his youth, might also express the lonely love of those who knew the grandeur and the beauty of the home. Perhaps, as with him, when the dawn slowly reddens the east, dimming the shadows of the night, a sudden flood of nostalgia engulfs the exile, laving him with memories of other places, other times. And so, with the poet, the exile relives the past.

"Then my wild pulse beats with eager joy,  
Beats the fierce music of a fiery boy;  
  
I saw the field as in a loved romance;  
Each leafy shrub and boulder gray  
  
And every grass blade by the beaten way,  
Lent beauty to each happy circumstance;  
  
And roundabout dear Fancy hung a golden veil  
Such as a dreamer weaves into an olden tale.

All day I mused among the conscious trees;  
The hum of winter bees,  
  
Caught in the coil of this warm winter day;  
The rippled brooklet on the white feldspar;  
The friendly talk of robins from afar;  
  
The chorus of the high, wild honker on his way  
To lakelets reedy, bent on plummy play;  
  
The many circling rills  
That sang their tunes among the grassy hills--  
These were a music to my raptured ear  
  
That even now I pause with raptured grace to hear."



LANG HOME - EAST BUTTE RD.



MR. & MRS. WILLIAM HENRY LANG  
(NEE ROSE ANN BURNS)



MRS. HONORA BURNS