THE CLARK FAMILY

JAMES CLARK (BORN 1820) AND THOMAS THE GOLD MINER (BORN 1816)

Quoting from my Father’s notes, “In the days of Grandfather James’ childhood in England, schooling was very scarce amont the middle class and farming people or yeomanry. Schools were all private and the children had to pay so much a semester so the older children did not get much of a formal education.” However Grandfather James had some as did his brother Thomas, and both were believers in education. After they came to the United States, chances were some better and James finally went to Lyman Beechers Academy. Lyman was a brother of Henry Ward Beecher. James had, of course, had to work his way and helped the cook and drove the family carriage. When Douglas was on stump speeching against Lincoln he drove him to the speaking and he said that he sneaked Douglas plug hat on once, and that it came right down to his shoulders, since he wore a size 7 and an eighth Douglas must have some head.

In England James had been taught the use of a bow and arrow, and also single stick practice, which is a sort of fencing with a staff about six feet long. The object of the single stick was to crack the other fellow’s pate and the staff was handled by two hands.

Great Grandfather Thomas (mine) was used to riding horses in England that jumped anything in sight, and when he came to Illinois and was trying out a horse for sale, he put it at a stone wall supposing it would jump like all English riding horses did, but it didn’t and Great Grandfather went over the wall alone much to his disgust.

In England of that day all the well-to-do wore boots out of doors and pumps or slippers in the house, but the poorer people wore shoes of untanned leather, hence the term “clodhopper shoes,” the children largely had to go barefoot, even to church and school, and when they got to the door they just put their shoes on. Grandfather James never felt dressed up until he had on a pair of French calfskin boots with extra high heels. For formal wear boots were worn inside the pants, but for ordinary wear the pants were tucked inside the top of the boots. That extra quarter inch of boot heel made Grandfather James six feet tall.

In 1848 Thomas apparently got the Oregon or California fever, but not at the same time. Thomas and two nephews, one, Robert, the son of Benjamin, went across the plains by horseback and pack horses to Oregon.

In 1849 Grandfather James, hearing of the gold discovery, decided to go to California. He started with a company of six, six mules and a wagon from St. Joseph, Missouri. They were heavily loaded with tools and other supplies. They joined a caravan that was so extensive that it reached as far as the eye could see, consequently they saw very few Indians or buffalo. He did however meet Kit Carson and became acquainted with him on the way. They were too heavily loaded and had to abandon some of their equipment and supplies, and finally started over the Sierra with only one pack mule. They went to Sacramento, but were too late in the fall to do any mining. Grandfather James bought some flower and apples, and made apple pie for sale to the miners. The price was a pinch of gold per pie. Flour sold at fifty dollars per sack, but he did not say how many pounds a sack weighed. In the spring as soon as the floods went down, he went to Georgetown and started mining. One day while talking to one of the miners near him, he said his name was Clark, and the man told him that there was another man named Clark who was sick and in a tent up on the hillside. Grandfather James went up to see him and found out it was his brother Thomas who had come west the year before. No further account was made of the nephews who had come west with Thomas the year before.

Grandfather James nursed his brother through a bad case of malaria, and they decided that they had enough of mining. They each had accumulated about $250, so they bought horses and went to Oregon; here they took up land in the Rogue River Valley.

Grandfather James bought all the work oxen he could get hold of and drove them south through Humboldt County, California to Marin County, where he fattened them up on the grassy hills and then swam them across the Golden Gate where the were sold for something like $8,000. (Note by Linwood LeBoeuf Clark, James’ grandson. There is considerable controversy about swimming the cattle across the Golden Gate. Some say that this could not be done and any records that would indicate that it was actually done were probably burned up in the San Francisco earthquake and fire in 1906. However Thomas Knowles Clark, my second cousin and the grandson of Charles Clark, James brother has written that Charles drove cattle to Sausalito where they were fattened up and then butchered, and then the meat was taken across the Golden Gate in a boat and sold.) This trip took about a month and then it took five or six days to ride back to Humboldt County.

Grandfather James told how when he was in Humboldt County one time that he saw the Buhner come over the bar and the town of Eureka started. On one of his trips when he was on the South Fork of the Mattole River a band of about 20 Indians, all in war paint, ran into him and the half breed boy he had helping him drive the cattle. Grandfather James bluffed the Indians into thinking that he had a party right behind him, but then he made himself scarce in a hurry. He said that when returning from San Francisco the money (gold dust) was put in pack blankets with a pick and shovel showing to make it appear that he was a miner. He said that he and his brother Charles continued to drive cattle from Oregon to Marin County for several years and made good money at it, but that the trip was so long and the country around Petrolia, Humboldt County so good for cattle that he made arrangements to buy land there in about 1851 from the squatters, and got the land patented in 1854, and that this is recorded in deeds in Eureka.

Grandfather James told of many adventures he had in those early days and one my Father remembered happened in the vicinity of Marysville Butte. He killed an elk which was so large that the horns were sold to a saloon for ten dollars. Another time he was prospecting along the Sacramento River bottom when he heard something thrashing around in the bushes and saw some grizzly bears heading toward him. He immediately left that area in a hurry and climbed a tree, but in so doing lost his rifle and pistol. He said that three big grizzlies sat around the base of the tree waiting for him to come down. Finally some soldiers from across the river heard him yelling and came across in a boat. He dropped down into the boat from an overhanging limb and got away. While in the area of California he more than once ate at the table at Bidwells. (The Bidwell Mansion in Chico is now a State Historic Park. Others who dined there included Susan B. Anthony, President Hayes, Governor Stanford, and General Sherman. – editor.) He explored this part of the country but decided he liked Humboldt County the best.