

FRESNO PAST AND PRESENT

Quarterly Bulletin of the Fresno County Historical Society

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Number 4

PILGRIMAGE TO SAVAGE'S GRAVE

The next meeting of the Society will be on Sunday, October 18, when Gordon L. Harlan, Clovis area rancher, will speak on the citrus industry in the Valley.

A week later, on Sunday, October 25, the members of our Society are invited, jointly with the members of the Madera County Historical Society, to take part in a pilgrimage to a spot of unusual significance and historical interest—the lonely grave of Major James D. Savage, friend of the Indians, leader of the Mariposa Battalion, and discoverer of Yosemite Valley. The grave is located on private land in Madera County, several miles from even a county road.

The invitation to join the cavalcade of cars going to this historic spot is extended to us by the Jim Savage Chapter of the Ancient and Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus. This organization is a state-wide group of men interested in California history. It has been averred that the members of E Clampus Vitus spend all their meeting time in a place of libation locally known as Slippery Gulch, but this is not true. Each Chapter has a positive program of historical value, chiefly the marking of historic landmarks, the preservation of old buildings, and pilgrimages to the graves of pioneers, such as this one to Savage's grave. The cavalcade of cars will leave from the Manchester District parking lot, at 10:00 a.m., Sunday, October 25.

Raymund F. Wood, Program Chairman

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Returning from a recent vacation in the north, my daughter and I drove down Highway 49 from Placerville to Columbia. At Angels Camp we stopped at an unpretentious-looking museum beside the highway. Though small in floor area, this private museum was packed with a wide variety of antique items, all of which deserved a larger building and better display cases to do justice to these interesting materials. A long shed nearby housed different kinds of horse-drawn vehicles.

Later, in Columbia we examined the displays in the many buildings which the State has restored and made into museums, and I visualized what an amazing change might be accomplished with the museum at Angels Camp with the aid of public backing.

Here in Fresno our Society's Roeding Park museum is not much better off than the private museum at Angels Camp. Our floor space is inadequate and we lack proper cabinets for the safe display of our historical material. We have even had to refuse offers of valuable collections because of the lack of safe and proper display space.

Until such time as we can obtain a new museum, perhaps an old brick home that could be converted to the purpose, we should do all in our power to increase our membership, so that more and more people in our community will become aware of our county's great need. Other cities and counties of our size have large, well equipped and well supported museums devoted to history. We also can have one if we make our united voices heard.

Edwin M. Eaton, President

FREMONT IN FRESNO COUNTY IN 1844

(Editor's note: This page summarizes the talk given on July 26, 1959, by Mr. Emory Ratcliffe, member of our Society.)

Early in 1843 Lieutenant John Charles Fremont, Corps of Topographical Engineers, U. S. Army, filed his Report of his First Expedition, which had taken him to the Rocky Mountains. The Report was printed at once and eagerly read by many people interested in the development of the West. It helped Fremont in his plans for his Second Expedition, the one that would take him across the future Fresno County in California; though he would have been as surprised as anyone else if he could have foreseen the agricultural wealth that would one day flow from the barren, empty land he crossed in his travels.

The Second Expedition, consisting of 39 men, left Kansas City on May 29, 1843, and proceeded towards the Northwest. The purpose of the expedition was "to connect the reconnaissance of 1842 (Fremont's First Expedition) with the surveys of Commander Wilkes on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, so as to give a connected survey of the interior of our continent."

Fremont proceeded along the Oregon Trail through Wyoming, Idaho, and Oregon to Fort Vancouver. Here he visited with Chief Factor McLoughlin who helped him to plan his return trip through the Great Basin country. Fremont turned southward through Oregon and entered Mexican territory (present-day Nevada) on December 27, 1843, in the general area of Winnemucca. After exploring parts of the Great Basin, including Pyramid Lake and the Truckee River, Fremont crossed the Sierra Nevada, passing over Carson Pass, discovered by Kit Carson on this trip and so named by Fremont himself. Fremont and his party, exhausted by the hardships of this crossing through the snow, arrived at Sutter's Fort (Sacramento) on March 6, 1844, and were welcomed by Sutter in person.

They left Sutter's Fort on March 24, and headed south, aiming for a pass previously discovered by Joseph Walker at the south end of our Valley. On March 25 they were on the Mokelumne, and the next day on the Calaveras. Between April

1 and April 4 they crossed the Tuolumne, the Merced, the Chowchilla, and the Fresno, keeping generally a little to the west of the present-day Highway 99.

On April 5 the party kept close to the eastern bank of the San Joaquin River. "The river was deep," writes Fremont. "and nearly on a level with the surrounding country . . . On the opposite side a line of timber was visible, which, according to information, points out the course of the slough which, in times of high water connects with the San Joaquin River—a large body of water in the upper part of the valley, called the Tule (Tulare) Lake." He continues, "We travelled 37 miles and encamped on the the river." This camp would have been in Madera County, northeast of Mendota.

It was the next day, April 6, 1844, that he crossed the San Joaquin River and entered our county. His diary reads, "After having travelled 15 miles along the river we made an early halt under the shade of sycamore trees. Here we found the San Joaquin coming down from the Sierra with a westerly course, and checking our way, as all its tributaries had previously done. We had expected to raft the river but found a good ford, and encamped on the opposite bank." At this point Fremont was in Fresno County.

Fremont goes on to describe the droves of wild horses he noticed as soon as he crossed the river, and specifically says that they raised "clouds of dust on the prairie."

The exact point of the crossing is impossible to determine. It is true that Fremont made, every day, very precise observations of latitude and longitude, but unfortunately his chronometer had suffered injury near Pyramid Lake and all his longitudes after that point are inaccurate. If we accepted his figures at their face value we would have to place the crossing out on the East Side, many miles from the river. The most probable place was at a point on the river about half way between Biola and Mendota, approximately due north of Tranquillity. This would place the crossing about seven miles downstream from the bridge now existing on Highway 145.

ALBERT G. WISHON, FOUNDER OF THE SAN JOAQUIN LIGHT AND POWER COMPANY

by

Charles L. Palmer

(Continued from April Issue)

One of the first proposals made to Wishon when he took over the Fresno properties in May, 1903 was that water meters be substituted for the flat rate hitherto charged. Wishon said: "No! If water is metered, then people will not water their lawns and their trees, and Fresno will be a dry, desert city. With flat rates it will become green and beautiful."

Wishon immediately set to work as manager of the San Joaquin Power Company, and carried out his ideas of persuading farmers to install electric pumps for irrigating their lands. He also encouraged the installation of electric lights instead of gas lights, with the result that the demand for electricity soon exceeded the supply available, and it was necessary to start the construction of other plants on Willow Creek, tributary to the San Joaquin River, where the first plant was located. In the meantime he extended power lines farther and farther afield, and within a few years had run a line across the northern end of Tulare County, which kept the Mt. Whitney Company from expanding to the north, and then, by acquiring the Power, Transit, and Light Company properties in Bakersfield, and by building a transmission line to Bakersfield by way of Taft, he was able to build a similar line across the north end of Kern County, which effectively limited the expansion of the Mt. Whitney system.

Other properties also were purchased and combined with San Joaquin Power. These included plants in Selma, Madera, and Merced, and finally, ten years after Wishon took over as manager, the lines were extended to San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara Counties, and a subsidiary company, the Midland Counties Public Service Corporation, was formed. In the meantime the capitalization of the San Joaquin Light and Power Company was increased to \$10,000,000 to aid in the rapid expansion that was under way, and to build additional plants.

The years from 1912 to 1918 were

years in which emphasis was placed on operations rather than expansion. This was partly due to the recession of 1914, and then to the demands of World War I, which limited the raising of capital for industrial growth. Money was hard to get, and at times employees were asked to wait for their pay. Some key employees, among them W. E. Durfey, E. P. Smith, A. B. Carpenter, and H. H. Courtright, were asked to take turns in mortgaging their homes to meet payrolls. This they did, the mortgages being repaid as power revenues were received. Because of this loyalty, which Wishon never forgot, all of these men rose to responsible positions in the Company.

Beginning in 1917, Wishon began direct work on a plan for the development of hydro-electric energy on the Kings River. This program was blocked by the lack of unity among the thirty-two irrigation districts and canal companies that drew water from the river for irrigating the crop lands in the valley. In 1918 the State sent Charles L. Kaupke to Fresno to straighten out the conflicting water rights and claims, since more than 200 legal actions had been filed in support of the many claims. By 1922 Kaupke had brought about a peaceful settlement of most legal claims, which permitted Wishon to proceed with the construction of the Balch Powerhouse on the north fork of the Kings River.

This plant, a stream flow plant, was operated under the orders of Kaupke, as Kings River Watermaster, and it was not until 1952, when the U. S. Army Engineers completed Pine Flat Dam for flood control, irrigation releases, and the re-regulation of upstream power releases, that the ultimate construction of Wishon's idea for full power development of the North Fork could be started. This was at last completed in 1958, with the construction of Courtright Dam, and particularly the dam named for Wishon himself, the Wishon Dam at Coolidge Meadow in the High Sierra.

(To be continued)

Fresno County Historical Society
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Fresno 3, California

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COMING EVENTS

October 18, 1959, Sunday, 2:00 p.m.

Fall quarterly meeting of the Society in the Guarantee Room, Blackstone and Ashlan Avenues, Fresno, California.

Speaker: Mr. Gordon L. Harlan.

Subject: The development of the citrus industry in the Valley, and plans for its future growth.

October 25, 1959, Sunday, 10:00 a.m.

Pilgrimage to Madera County grave of Major James D. Savage, sponsored by E Clampus Vitus. See page 1 for more details.

January 17, 1960, Sunday, 2:00 p.m.

Winter quarterly meeting of the Society in the Guarantee Room.

Speaker and subject to be announced at a later date.

Membership Dues:

Active	- - - - -	\$ 1.00
Husband and Wife	- - - - -	2.00
Sustaining	- - - - -	10.00
Life	- - - - -	100.00

Membership year is from January through December.

Membership dues are tax deductible.

Please send manuscripts and pictures to the editor, and notices of change of address to the secretary.

GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY

An interesting recent gift was the set of ancient keys to the old County jail, soon to be torn down. These brass keys, weighing about half a pound each, and the massive ring that secured them, were presented to our Society by Sheriff Melvin A. Willmirth, through the good offices of Robert M. Wash, County Counsel. These old keys, long ago superseded by more modern tumbler locks and keys, will be added to our growing collection of items illustrating the history of our County.

Fresno County Historical Society

Officers — 1959

President: Edwin M. Eaton

Vice-President: Richard E. Denton

Secretary-Treasurer: Nelle Minnick

146 E. Simpson Avenue

Fresno 5, California

Fresno Past and Present

Editor: Raymund F. Wood

1927 Cornell Avenue

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Mailing Office: 4191 North Blackstone

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