

# ~ THE SPRINGER BROTHER'S SAGA ~



*Wagon Train Pioneers of America's Western Frontier*

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## FORWARD

The Springer family is a classic example of the adventurous souls who emigrated to America's western frontier during California's Gold Rush Era. The pioneers that traversed the Great Mississippi River, America's vast plains, the craggy Great Divide, and the scorching deserts of the West via covered wagon were a distinct breed born in the midst of a chosen generation. These grandchildren of our revolutionary forefathers witnessed the realization of a dream. That dream was the formation of North America's United States from *Sea to Shining Sea*. The Springer's were privileged to actually live that dream along with an estimated half million adventurous miners, ranchers & homesteaders. They came to California from 1849 to 1869 seeking land, gold, milk & honey.

By 1852, Loisanna and George Springer were a well-seasoned frontier couple. As did many of their generation, the Springer clan literally followed the pioneer path of *Manifest Destiny* as the original thirteen colonies expanded from east to west. About 1830, George and Loisanna were betrothed in New York State. By 1834, this young pioneer couple made the bold decision to leave the colonial comforts of Old New England forever more. The War of 1812 and Louisiana Purchase opened up a vast new territory for homesteaders, and so, the Springer's went forth to explore the newly established Mid-Western States. First, they emigrated from New York to Illinois for six years, then on to the state of Michigan for over a decade. Alas, the restless pioneer spirit in them was not quenched. George and Loisanna were *Bound to See the Elephant* yet again. In April of 1852, the Springer family wagon train departed Niles, Michigan and set out to explore America's Western Frontier.

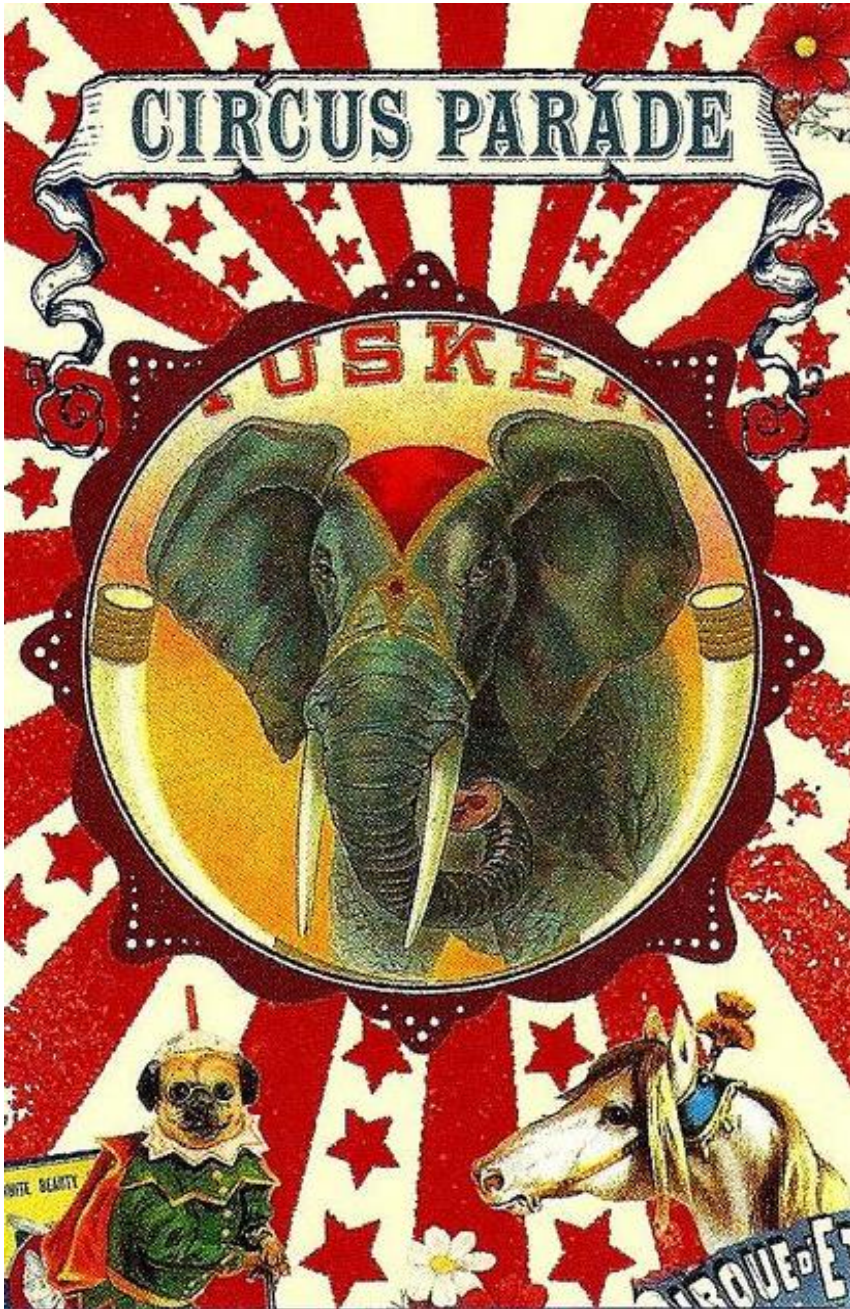
The following saga seeks to portray the lives of George and Loisanna's eight children who traveled aboard the Springer wagon train bound for Sacramento, California. Over the course of the following decade, these wide-eyed kids witnessed the booming era of prosperity that transpired in Old Sacramento in particular, and California in general, in the wake of the Gold Rush. This little-known pioneer family became intimately involved with some of the most prominent figures of the Gold Rush, Sutter's Fort and the founding fathers of Old Sacramento. It was the time of their lives and a journey that we can now share with you, the descendants of these venerable pioneers and California history buffs alike.

George and Loisanna's brood consisted of five girls and three boys ranging in age from six to twenty. Keep in mind, the five girls were a commodity of sorts. Surely, the boys could work the farm or tend to the livestock, but white women were few and far between during this early era of California's Anglo history. This mother and father would have to keep a close eye on the girls as they grew up. In the early days of California's Gold Rush Era, it is said the ratio of men to women was nearly one thousand to one. As these girls came of age in Sacramento, (Louisa, Rosanna, Phebe, Isabel and Sarah) they would have been of keen interest to the droves of earnest men who came west. Keep in mind that young Phebe would die oh so young, and eldest daughter Louisa had already married back in Michigan. It is important to note that there would be no child brides among the other Springer girls, although this was an accepted custom of the times. Mother Loisanna would not allow it.

All but one of the five Springer girls lived to their childbearing years. However, only the lovely Isabel was blessed to live on to old age. All three of Isabel's surviving sisters married and had children with interesting men. Alas, Sarah and Rosanna died unfairly young. The later life of eldest sister Louisa Springer-Suits-Ingram is yet in question. We do know she remarried but not much else. Therefore, due in part to the relatively early deaths of at least three of the five Springer girls, the main focus of the following saga is the three boys: Van Rensselaer (Van), George Davidson and Nelson Leroy (Nels) Springer. The Springer brothers were blessed enough to live on through the dangerous times of the Wild West & Gold Rush Era, becoming old men who reminisced about it all.

## BOUND TO SEE THE ELEPHANT

Before we explore the lives of the Springer children, one phrase you may question in this saga is the popular expression of the times: "Bound to See the Elephant." It is one of the most popular expressions of the day.



The story goes that when carnival and circus events began making the rounds in early nineteenth century America, one particular farmer was fascinated by the prospect of seeing an elephant for the first time. He was told of a circus that would soon perform in a neighboring town and decided to go there to witness the spectacle, hoping to fulfill his dream of seeing a pachyderm in the flesh. This curious man wasted no time and immediately drove to the nearby town in a wagon loaded with a harvest of vegetables. *He was Bound to See the Elephant.*

Upon the farmer's arrival, the circus parade just happened to be entering town and he did indeed see an elephant. The enthralled man actually drove his wagon right beside the massive animal, startling his horse. The terrified pony bolted down the street in panic, overturning the farmer's wagon and ejecting the man in the process. As a few townsfolk helped the shaken farmer to right his wagon and steady his horse, one commented on what a shame it was his vegetables were ruined in the mishap. The plucky fellow stated: "It is no matter, for I have seen the elephant! His eloquent words were somehow picked up by the newspapers of the day, nationwide. Thus, one humble farmer's simple yet eloquent thoughts, words and deeds were forever immortalized and quoted thereafter by many pioneers who knowingly suffered the extreme hardships of America's western frontier in order to emigrate to California.



## THE SPRINGER JOURNAL

We would know little of the Springer wagon train journey to California in 1852 if not for a journal George Washington Springer kept. It is a family treasure that has now been digitized. Thankfully, Mr. Springer jotted down short notes on a daily basis that describe the entire trip. Even a photocopy of the diary was legible. His penmanship was excellent. George tells us, by way of reference, that the Springer clan traveled to California with a few other adventurous families from their community of Niles, Michigan. A dozen surnames are mentioned throughout the journal but no reference to a wagon master or guide for this Michigan contingent is evident, nor is the number of wagons that started west with them. A likely candidate for wagon master is Mr. Springer himself. After all, George kept meticulous track of mileage as they went along, sometimes in the surveyor's measurement of rods. It was as if he was mapping the route to retrace his steps if necessary. Did he plan to bring more family and friends out west at a later date, or was George unsure if they would stay in California?

According to Mr. Springer, their dangerous three-thousand-mile trek first took them through the Midwest to the Upper Mississippi River in Iowa. They camped at Boston Prairie and crossed their wagons and cattle near there at a shallow slue. Father states that eldest child, "Louiza" (Louisa) "crossed the goods there." What a gal she must have been. The Mississippi would mark the first of several river crossings along the way, all of which are recorded in the journal. Even ferry toll prices are included in Mr. Springer's careful notes.

From the Upper Mississippi, they traveled the vast expanse of the Great Plains, traversed the Great Divide and rode past the rugged mountains and deserts of the Utah Territory. They arrived at Provo City on a cold and windy night, the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. As they arrived at The Great Salt Lake on October 1<sup>st</sup>, snow greeted the Springer contingent. The dangers of Sierra snowstorms weighed heavily on George's mind. The Springer's headed south to "Los Vagos" arriving there two weeks later. They rested a few days at the Vagos in preparation for their desert crossing of the dangerous and desolate Mojave. They entered the Mohave Desert on November 1<sup>st</sup> and arrived in Southern California at San Bernardino on Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> of 1852. The route Mr. Springer chose was definitely not the most traveled one from the Mid-West to the gold country. Some eager pioneers opted for the more dangerous but direct route over the rugged Sierras. That is if they could get there by late August. Prudent pioneers went by way of the Oregon Trail. Instead, this unrelenting group headed down the southern branch of the Mormon Trail. George Washington Springer would not be delayed nor deterred by winter weather.

The Springer's traveled to California along with many Eastern emigrants rushing to the gold fields. Estimates are that one hundred thousand pioneers participated in the initial rush of 1849. In 1850, during the height of western migration by covered wagon, an estimated fifty-two thousand adventurous souls traveled out west. In 1851, about forty-eight thousand made "The Crossing." In 1852, when the Springer's traveled across the plains, another massive wave of livestock and humanity headed west. It is said that fifty-thousand people emigrated that year. These first four years of the initial California Gold Rush would mark the peak of western migration by way of the celebrated covered wagon. Thus, an estimated quarter of a million people would go down in history.

Due in no small part to the massive wave of pioneers that made the crossing in 1852, it is not surprising Mr. Springer writes of teaming up with other wagon trains. Traveling together added a bit more to the chances of survival on the frontier. Safety in numbers. One such group was a large Mormon contingent of fifty wagons headed by the legendary Joseph Smith. A smaller group that periodically traveled alongside the Springers had a wagon master named David Putnam. Perhaps Mr. Putnam was the guide for the Springer contingent too.

In addition to fifty thousand pioneers who came west along with the Springers this year, an estimated ninety thousand head of oxen, cattle, horses, mules and sheep were moved from the east to the new western territories in the year of 1852. George mentions his own cattle in the journal, but how many head he possessed is a question. In any event, it is no wonder the Springer journal records several instances of poor grazing and bad water over the course of their difficult journey. The well-established watering holes along the way were surely fouled up and trailside grazing land was chewed to the nub. Livestock tended to wander more at night seeking grass and water. Waterborne disease was rampant too, due in no small part to the massive number of pioneers and livestock that moved across the plains this year. They also had to compete for feed with the immense buffalo and elk herds. It was difficult for George Springer to find fresh food and potable water for his family, let alone the livestock.

In his journal, George once describes the Indians of the plains as "discrete." It was during the relatively peaceful times of early western migration that America's plains tribes were still somewhat tolerant with the white man. At first glance, the Great Plains Nations were amazed and surely shocked at the sheer number of people and livestock they saw traveling over their lands. George notes the more distrustful Indians were observed at a distance while friendly natives approached the Springer Party to sell melons and corn. In contrast, according to the nuance of the Springer journal, the native attitude changed as they made their way through the deserts of Utah and Nevada. Outside of "Los Vagos" near Nelphi of Zoab County, the desert Paiute clans were not at all hospitable. George speaks of vicious nighttime attacks on the livestock among their party as they entered this dangerous and desolate region. After this incident, they moved quickly through the desert, traveling on through the night now, as it was cooler. They picked up the pace to double and almost triple their average mileage of 8 to 10 miles per day. George never speaks of a direct attack by any tribe, but other wagon trains would not be so lucky.

Despite all of the hardships and danger, the three young Springer boys witnessed the incredible spectacle of America's first cowboys moving huge herds of livestock across the plains. This bigger than life scene undoubtedly left a lasting impression on them. Van, the eldest boy, showed a great interest in the cattle business all through his life. The spectacle of long wagon trains also painted an unforgettable picture in the boy's minds. Van's younger brother George followed this pursuit for during the course of his adult life. He was an accomplished teamster and wagon master, said to have hauled freight for the construction of the Trans-Continental Railroad. George witnessed the moment when the ceremonial Golden Spike was sunk at Promontory, Utah in 1869.

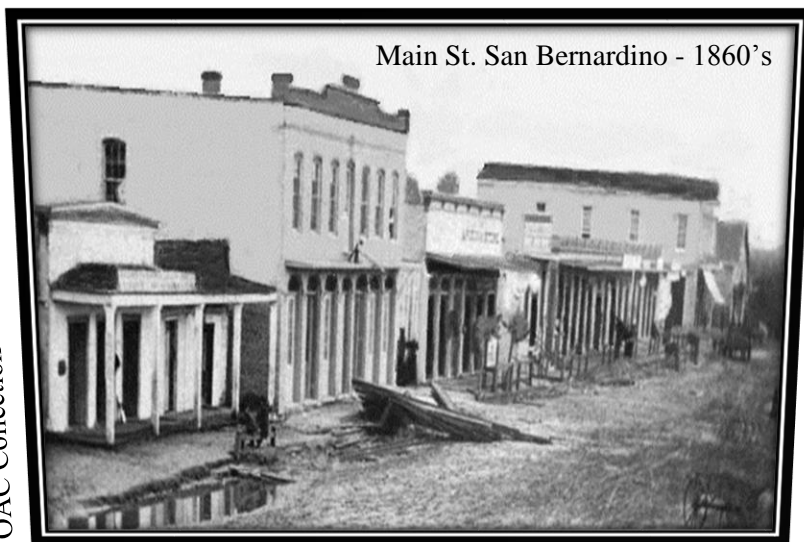
The 1850 Van Buren County, Michigan Census states the Springer boys were all of the age to have some memory of this wagon train adventure from Niles, Michigan to Sacramento, California. Nelson, the youngest boy, was five years old. George was at the impressionable age of eight years and Van was a gangly teenager of thirteen. The events of this eight-month odyssey were retold many times amongst the family, reinforcing oral tradition.

At eight years of age, young George Davidson Springer may have been old enough to walk beside the wagons, as was the fate of his three elder sisters, and it is likely he was walking for long stretches with them. George was closest in age to his younger brother Nels and six-year-old sister Rosanna and probably rode with them at times too. The youngest of the Springer children were still a bit young to keep pace with the wagons for any great distance and could easily get into mischief. Springer-Harrison family tradition states that ten-year-old sister Isabel walked for most of the journey. She even complained of it to her grandchildren. Eleven-year-old Phebe and seventeen-year-old Sarah surely marched for much of the trip too. Perhaps eldest sister Louisa drove a wagon of her own. She was feisty. It is hard to imagine these young girls hiking nearly two thousand miles in those hot petticoats. Somehow, they persevered. Isabel also spoke of rolling the younger children up in a feather bed to protect them from arrows when an Indian attack seemed eminent. So young, but she was such a brave little girl.

It would make sense that young George helped his mother with the chores of setting up the evening camp as they went along. He surely began to take on similar tasks back at the family farm in Michigan. Sarah, Isabel and Phebe were probably too exhausted to help much after walking beside the wagons all day. Later on in this saga, we will speak of the literary fame George and Nels Springer derived in Oregon due to their ability to make that ever popular frontier staple known as *pan bread*. Undoubtedly, they watched their mother cook it many times with great anticipation during the course of their westward journey.

The young Van Springer was surely an indispensable part of keeping the wagons and livestock moving westward. He was already familiar with many of chores and skills that would be required of him during the trek to California. His experience of living and working on the family farm was his training ground. George Washington Springer counted heavily on his eldest son to be his counterpart, especially in rough terrain where the teams of oxen towing the overloaded wagons would need persuasive prodding with the whip and walking stick. It is not hard to picture father and son walking beside the prairie schooner, yelling, whistling and cracking the whip at the plodding beasts in order to keep them moving. On April 20th, early into the trip, George mentions an injury young Van sustained while repairing one of the wagons. He also talks of a hay wagon in his journal. Was this the wagon Louisa drove?

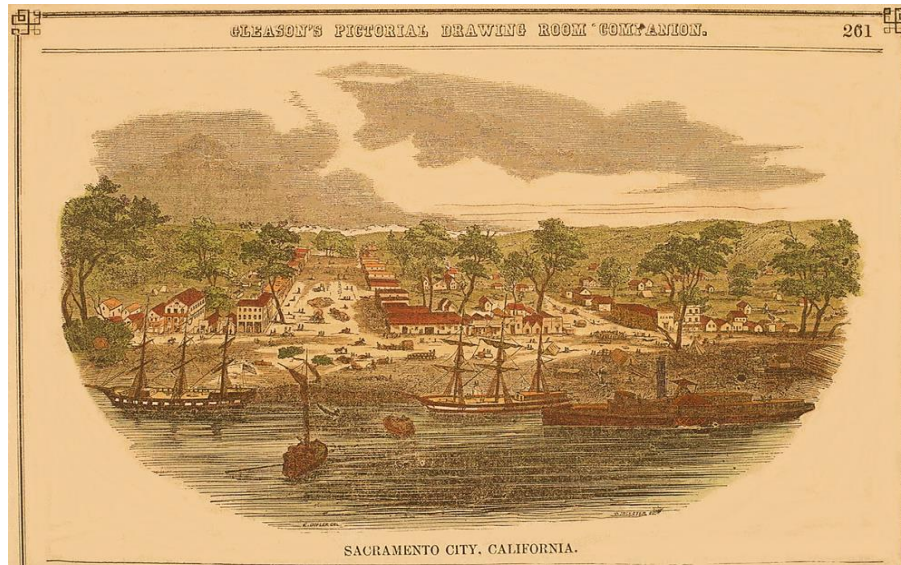
OAC Collection



After riding through the treacherous Mojave Desert, they arrived at the Mormon settlement of San Bernardino on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1852. They remained there for about a week to rest up. Mr. Springer mentions the "Smith Party" came in just after their arrival. They had been crossing paths with this man and his large contingent of wagons for some time now according to George's journal entries. Mr. Springer states on November 16th: "this day sold the team and wagon for two hundred-forty dollars." This was the invaluable *prairie schooner*. The entire family slept on the ground, at times in the rain, during the next four nights.

The Springer's departed San Bernardino for San Pedro to book passage on a ship to Northern California. Not only did the Springer children experience the agonizingly slow pace of travel by way of oxen powered covered wagon, they also discovered what it was like to travel by a swift steam ship on the great Pacific Ocean. George writes of seeing the steamer Ohio coming into port on November 25th of 1852. The family's ocean voyage is confirmed through the Rasmussen collection of San Francisco's Ship Logs. According to Rasmussen, they departed from San Pedro and not San Pueblo as George records in the journal. The Ohio's logbook states: "J. W. Springer, wife

and seven children" were passengers aboard this vessel. They spent the next four days sailing up the coast of California to San Francisco. The mighty steamship Ohio stopped at several ports along the way, including Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Monterey. On the 29th of November, they left Monterey at five o'clock in the evening. The following morning, the exhausted and seasick Springer family arrived at San Francisco "among rough seas and heavy winds." They wasted no time there. George booked passage to Sacramento and he writes that the family spent the night aboard a ship known as the "Free Trader." They left the city the following morning aboard this unidentified class of vessel bound for Sacramento. December 1st of 1852, after eight months of travel, the Springer's arrived at the bustling delta village of Sacramento to begin a new chapter of their lives.



## THE SACRAMENTO YEARS

When the Springer family first settled in at Sacramento, we know that the hardships continued. They had already endured a difficult sojourn that had tested them to the limit, and all had survived. This was a miracle in itself. Thanks be to the Almighty! The next challenge would be the persistent winter floods briefly described by the Springer patriarch in the last month of his journal. George more than once states, "the floods came in on us." Alas, Mr. Springer's notes end far too soon. There are few entries in the journal's final month of December, no doubt, due to the intolerable rains and flooding. After that, we have no more in writing from George Washington Springer and know little of what transpired over the following two decades while the family was living in Old Sacramento.

We do know that tragedy struck in 1853. The Springer boys lost their thirteen-year-old sister Phebe in February to tuberculosis. Father George died of the same malady in September of 1854. He was fifty-four at the time. Phebe and George Washington Springer are both buried in the historic Sacramento City Cemetery. This landmark pioneer burial ground was originally set aside by the Swiss immigrant, Captain Johann "John" Augustus Sutter, founder of the ill-fated colony of New Helvetia. Several key players in the Gold Rush Era scenario are buried in Sutter's magnificent cemetery along with George and Phebe. May all the pioneers buried there rest in peace.

The Sacramento City Cemetery records indicate that George and Phebe's remains were moved early on to this famous California pioneer burial ground from another location, probably to get them out of the flood zone. These records also indicate Phebe Springer's cause of death was "lung inflammation." Father George is said to have succumbed to "consumption." Tuberculosis, cholera, malaria, whooping cough and other such diseases were common and of unknown origins. Few successful treatments were available. Cause of death was not always accurate due to sheer ignorance. Common explanations for the pathology of tuberculosis were similar to the symptoms stated for the untimely demise of this vigorous father and his darling daughter. What a travesty.



Losing patriarch George Washington Springer so soon after arriving in California brings to mind his journal entries in mid-June of 1852. He describes his own sickness, fever and chills. Is this when disease began to affect this vigorous man and one of his girls? Even more likely, the floods of Sacramento the Springer's endured upon their arrival was the cause. The rest of the family wasn't infected as far as we know. A decade later, sister Sarah Ellen Springer would die at Sacramento of "consumption." Water borne diseases took many in those days.

The loss of his father in 1854 surely made sixteen-year-old Van become a man before his time. His will had been forged on the westward trail. This journey prepared him to step into his father's big boots. It would be less than two years after their arrival in California that young Van formally began to help his mother support the Springer family full time. It is most likely he became a drover or teamster for hire. His two younger brothers were still of school age at this point and would get an education no matter what. Loisanna would see to that. She signed her name with an "X," but made sure her children did not.

**MILLINERY, DRESSMAKING, ETC.**

**FASHIONABLE MILLINERY !**

**NEW SPRING GOODS!**

 **MISS EMMONS, 145 J street,**  
Between Fifth and Sixth,  
Has opened her New Spring Styles of  
**Bonnets and Hats,**  
And has a magnificent variety of Flowers, Ornaments  
and other Trimmings, all New and Beautiful. The  
prices of Spring Hats lower than ever. m29-1m4p

**GRAND OPENING.**

 **NEW SPRING MILLINERY.**  
MAGNIFICENT DISPLAY !  
**MRS. A. CROOKS,** successor to Mrs.  
Springer, 147 J street, between 5th and 6th,  
has just received her new styles of  
**Spring Bonnets and Hats,**  
In Straw and all the Fashionable Materials.  
New shade of RIBBONS and CHOICE TRIMMINGS,  
in great variety. m8-1m4p

The widow Loisanna Green-Springer had a bit of money left over from the sale of their Michigan farmland to keep them going for a while, but those funds couldn't have supported seven fast-growing children for too long. Van and his mother had to feed them somehow. Exactly how Loisanna Springer and her young son supported the family for the next several years is still a bit of a mystery. One possibility is that Loisanna ran a boarding house as many widows did back then. There are also a few Sacramento newspaper advertisements during the early 1870's referring to a *Mrs. Springer Hat & Dress Maker*. We have not confirmed this to be our Loisanna Springer.

Another possible source of income is revealed to us by way of brief notations in the George Springer's Journal in mid-December of 1852. These telling entries record that over the course of three consecutive days, George Washington Springer gave a total of fifteen hundred dollars in five hundred-dollar increments (\$75,000 today) to a man named Robertson. Quite an impressive sum for the times, but what was this money for? Descendant Blanche Stroop suggests the relatively large investment George Washington Springer made was a payment for the brickyard mentioned in his journal as the first Sacramento residence of the Springer family. Bricks were in high demand. Many structures in Old Sacramento were made of this durable construction material. The brickyard could have served to provide the income George needed. Building materials were so scarce at this time, it would have been a smart investment. Just up the road at Sutter's Fort, mobs of prospectors and squatters had swooped in seeking fortune. In the process, the more desperate vagabonds dismantled Sutter's fortifications to make their shanties, flumes and rockers while he and his friends were away at Sutter's Flour Mill turned gold mine.

The Springer children came of age in Sacramento during the thrilling times when this little delta hamlet was really starting to blossom. Millions in gold was still being mined in the year of 1852, and this was three years after the initial rush. In the following decade, due in no small part to the windfall of mineral wealth the Sacramento area accumulated, the Springer family would witness a muddy riverside frontier trading post develop into the grand capitol city of California. Undoubtedly, it was the best of times.

## VAN RENSSELAER SPRINGER TAKES THE RAP

An incident occurred in May of 1866 in Sacramento involving all three Springer boys and Ephraim Harrison. It is a curious legal situation discovered in the Sacramento newspapers. Presently, the media accounts are the only information we have. However, it is possible court transcripts may still exist which would shed more light on what actually transpired. The search continues. According to these brief newspaper accounts, all three Springer brothers and brother-in-law Ephraim Harrison were arrested and charged with Grand Larceny as horse thieves. A serious crime in the old west that normally ended with the thief being hung. In this case, a trial was convened.

*From the Sacramento Daily Union: County Court [Report].* - The County Court met yesterday at the usual hour, Judge Clark on the bench. The trial of Van Rensselaer Springer, on a charge of grand larceny, in stealing a mare owned by Peter Joseph was resumed. After hearing the conclusion of the evidence, and the argument of S. S. Holl for the prosecution, and M. C. Tilden for the defense, the jury retired, and after about five hours absence returned without being able to agree, and were discharged. The trial of Nelson Springer, on the same charge, was then commenced. Jurors were impaneled... Several witnesses were examined when Ephraim Harrison was called to testify for the prosecution. The witness is a brother-in-law of the Springers and was indicted along with them for the same offense. Soon after the arrests, Harrison turned State's evidence, and in the Police Court testified in the case, implicating all the Springers and himself. Yesterday, on account of his barring turned State's evidence, a nollo pro quid entered as to the witness. When called to the stand, however, Harrison declined to testify. He stated that he did not know exactly what he had stated before [to] the Police Court; that he was at the time in poor health, and that so many threats and promises had been made to him while in custody that his mind became confused. The Court informed the witness that any testimony which he might give could not, under the law, be used against him, and that whether his statements in the Police Court were true or untrue, correct or incorrect, it was now his duty simply to state to the jury the truth and nothing but the truth. The witness still refused to testify. He was then committed for contempt and sent to the County Jail. The further hearing of the case was then postponed until 10 o'clock a. m. today, to which hour the Court adjourned.

Judge Clark passed sentence yesterday on defendants previously convicted, as follows: Van Rensselaer Springer, for grand larceny, one year in the State Prison. Term to date from delivery at the State Prison. Van Rensselaer Springer was recently convicted of grand larceny and was yesterday sentenced by Judge Clark to one year's imprisonment in the State Prison. **Sacramento Daily Union, Volume 31, Number 4724, 17 May 1866-Page 3.**

There certainly is much more to this story. As stated, it was not uncommon in the old west for punishment for horse thieving to be hanging, sometimes a trial was not even an issue and the "sentence" was carried out immediately. Not so in this case, which may say a lot for the Springer/Harrison reputation in Sacramento as a respected family. However, the single horse stolen from Peter Joseph was valued at \$150.00. Such a large price for horse flesh (\$5,000 today) presents a question as to the true motivation of the Springer's in this case. Perhaps this was a deal gone bad involving a racehorse or prime breeding stock. Van was a drover and surely had a few good ponies available to him at any given time. His motivation was highly unlikely to be thievery. The same goes for his accomplices. What about brother George Springer? He was also indicted but the only mention of him appears in the newspaper in reference to the "three brothers and Ephraim Harrison." Although they were all indicted, in the end only Van was punished. Again, an odd circumstance. Another article published in February of 1866 talks of a request for separate trials for all four men which obviously affected the outcome. Van did a year in San Quentin over this fiasco. We are not sure how long Ephraim Harrison spent in jail over all this either. It seems Nels case was dropped. At first glance, it appears Van took the rap for young Nelson Springer's indiscretion. In any event, the whole incident is a bit bizarre. By the time Van got out of prison, the Harrison and Springer clan had moved to Lower Lake in Lake County, California and put all this behind them.

## UNCLE BILL

First, before we talk of the personal relationships the Springer's made due to their settlement in the Sacramento area, a portion of the Springer-Green family history must be inserted here so as to understand why the kids were known to have spent some of their youth in Georgetown of El Dorado County, California.

William Baker Green was the brother of the Springer children's mother, Loisanna. Keep in mind, several years prior to the California migration, over the course of almost two decades, the Green family moved on with the Springer's as they made their way from New York to Illinois and then on to Michigan. Other members of the Green family tree preceded the Springer's first migration from New York to Galena, Illinois. John C. Green is credited with being a founding father of Galena. John's wife Charity was George Washington Springer's sister. We are fairly certain John was Loisanna's uncle or possibly, she was his baby sister. Their relationship is still in question due to a lack of documentation regarding the Springer-Green clan and its early American genealogy. DNA research is now in progress to help clarify and expand upon these two old colonial bloodlines. Blanche Stroop has suggested they may have originally been Tories.

Oddly, although brother William and sister Loisanna were close, when the Green-Springer clan emigrated from Michigan to California, William Baker Green & family would only travel part of the way with the Niles contingent. On July 18, it is mentioned in George Washington Springer's journal that his eldest daughter Louisa along with her husband Joseph Suits parted company with the Springer wagon train about twenty-five miles from Fort Laramie. It is known by Springer-Harrison family tradition that William Baker Green and his immediate family joined with Joe and Louisa Suits in taking the northern route to the west coast.

The Green-Suits splinter group camped out "somewhere in the Utah Territory" through the winter of 1852. This was such a huge area it's next to impossible to know exactly where they camped. We surmise they thought to lay over near Salt Lake, wait for spring, and then head up the Oregon Trail. Possibly, they held back there due to the threat of snow upon their late summer arrival in the territory. Someone convinced this group to hold up for the winter. Bear in mind, the Donner Party nightmare was fresh in the minds of the entire nation. Is this why George Springer chose to push on, traveling along the longer but more temperate southern fork of the Mormon Trail?

For some reason, the Suits-Green splinter group was delayed from leaving Utah the following spring. Perhaps this additional hold up was due in part to the pregnancy of Louisa Springer-Suits. Louisa gave birth to Lois Ann Springer-Suits in September of 1853 in the Utah Territory. This is according to the child's own account. Possibly the delay was caused by a difficult pregnancy and/or some members of the Suits-Green party were ill. Then again, they might have considered settling there. George Springer commented on some land near Salt Lake that was the "prettiest he'd ever seen." Had he decided to remain in Utah, chances are George would have lived a lot longer.

We surmise the Green-Suits splinter group wagons finally made it to California in the summer of 1854 but have no real evidence as to exactly when they arrived. One possibility is that this contingent had gone by way of the Oregon Trail. In 1850, George Washington Springer's brother Barney settled in Oregon. Did the Green-Suits Party visit Barney Springer first before traveling south to California? Whenever they finally moved on from the Utah Territory, we know by way of the 1860 California Census that the Greens settled in the Georgetown area of El Dorado County, California. The same census also shows the Suits family opted to settle in Chico, California. Chico is a land known for its rich soil and a man named Bidwell, who we will meet later in this story.

It is obvious the Green and Springer clan remained close despite the miles between them. There was much visiting between the Greens of Georgetown and the Springer's of Sacramento. The 1860 El Dorado County Census shows the Springer boys beloved eighteen-year-old sister Isabel listed as a "domestic" in the Green household. She had recently separated from her fiancé. It was a tempestuous relationship that did not last.

Another noteworthy fact is that the Begley clan was living in Georgetown at this time. We will speak of this family in more detail later on in this saga. This Kentucky pioneer family would have a major influence on the young George Davidson Springer two decades later. He would marry into the Begley family, but we wonder if these pioneers and their children first met at Georgetown? It is a likely possibility and a small world back then.

William Baker Green was reportedly a farmer and rancher in Michigan. Once settled in at Georgetown, we surmise he began to till the virgin soil of El Dorado County in order to bolster his cattle production. He would have made a good living providing grain, fresh produce, beef and the other essentials needed by the gold prospectors and settlers of the area. Farming and ranching were lucrative occupations during the Gold Rush Era. Milk went for a dollar a gallon, or about \$30 today! (2020) At Georgetown, the Springer boys honed their agriculture and stock raising skills under the watchful eyes of their Uncle Bill. George Davidson Springer would utilize these valuable skills in the course of his adult life. It is likely Van ran livestock around Georgetown for his Uncle Bill and others during this time. This Springer kid was a genuine cowpoke.

William Green was not only a great mentor to his nephews, he surely helped his sister Loisanna raise her large brood in any other way that he could after she lost her husband in 1854. This brother and sister were close, so close that three years after Loisanna moved from Sacramento to Lower Lake, California in 1867, her beloved brother was living there with his family too. The 1870 census of Lake County enumerates William living nearby his sister in Lower Lake with his wife Ruby Treat-Green and their sons: Merrick, Noble, George and Sherman. According to William Green's probate, he had acquired two hundred forty acres in forty-acre parcels around Lower Lake in the few years he lived there.

Sadly, the migration to Lower Lake would be the last for this adventurous brother and sister. The California Green family patriarch would live for only three more years after the 1870 census came out. William Baker Green passed on in 1873 at fifty-three years of age. This may seem young in this day and age, but his death was actually six years past the average male life expectancy for the times. His beloved elder sister Loisanna would die the following year at an estimated age of sixty-two. She was an incredibly strong and brave pioneer woman. These Green clan siblings had endured much to bring their offspring to the Golden State. William and Loisanna are buried side by side, below impressive headstones carved from local volcanic rock in the historic Herndon Pioneer Cemetery of Lower Lake, California. William was surely a good influence on the Springer boys and a great comfort to their mother throughout her life. May this brother & sister of the Green Clan rest in peace.

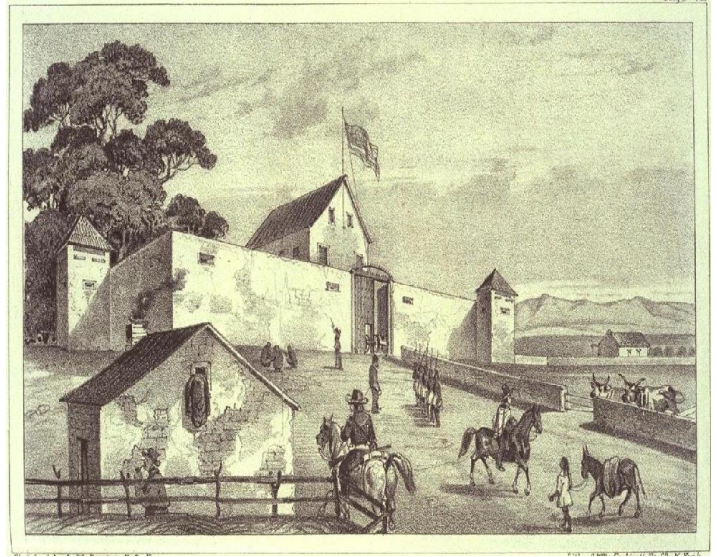


Author Kevin Engle at the gravesite of William Baker Green & his sister Loisanna Springer

## FRIENDS AND MENTORS

*Captain John Sutter, General John Bidwell,  
Captain Granville Commodore Perry Swift &  
Stephen Hite Become Springer Acquaintances*

By 1854, the little town of Sacramento City and Johann Sutter's *New Helvetia* settlement were well on the way to becoming the cultural centers of the territory. It is quite certain the Springer brothers met and grew up around several members of Sutter's inner circle of friends. Among the men they were surely acquainted with were Granville Swift, Stephen Hite, and Ephraim Harrison. Quite possibly they were familiar with John Bidwell and even Sutter himself. All these men were incredible role models for the Springer boys.



New Helvetia – Sutter's Fort



Johann Augustus Sutter

The young Iowa school-teacher John Bidwell visited Sutter's Fort soon after his arrival in the territory in 1841 and became fast friends with John Sutter. This well-educated man soon became Sutter's trusted business manager too. When not working for Captain Sutter, Mr. Bidwell spent much of his time exploring and surveying Mexico's "Alta" California. He speaks in his memoirs of well-received visits among the various tribes of the region. He was known to carry a severed bear's paw with him on one occasion, which seemingly impressed the tribes to no end. Bidwell's memoirs allude to his fascination with tribal people and their ancient wisdom. It's evident he enjoyed their company. Bidwell later served honorably in the Bear Flag Revolt of 1846 and attained the rank of Major. His claims to fame are many.

As were the Springers, John Bidwell was a native son of New York, born there in 1819. In 1841, he became a leading member of the first major wagon train to cross the Sierras into the Mexican territory of Alta California. This famous group of American settlers, known as the Bidwell-Bartelson Party, ushered in the initial wave of pioneer families that would make California their own. Members of this pivotal wagon train became key players in the Bear Flag Revolt, the Gold Rush, and the California Republic's formative years, none more than Bidwell.

In 1848, the fortunate Mr. Bidwell discovered gold at the Feather River a few months after James Marshall discovered gold on the American River. Bidwell accumulated a vast fortune there. He would make good use of this windfall in the following years. After the thrill of the Gold Rush, Bidwell began to entertain political aspirations as California entered the Union. He became an instrumental figure in shaping the state's political ideals. Bidwell served as Brigadier General of the California Militia during the Civil War. He served as a United States Congressman from 1864 to 1867 and chaired the Congressional Committee of Agriculture. He was a passionate proponent of the anti-monopoly platform and supported prohibition throughout his political career. Many Northern Californians lamented in the year of 1875 when General John Bidwell ran unsuccessfully for Governor of California. He lost an earnest bid for President. Some say Bidwell's disdain of whiskey was a political red herring in his quest for higher office.



U.S. Congressman John Bidwell

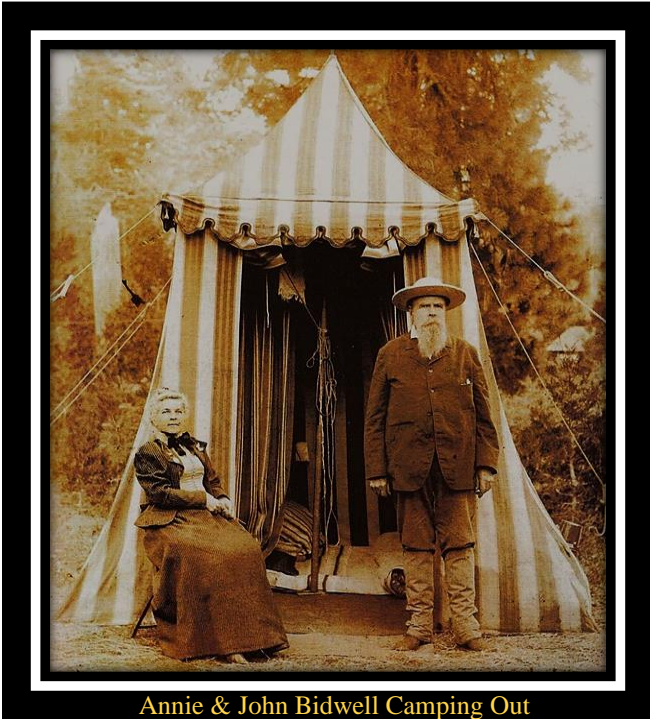
Despite his political setbacks, Bidwell's keen mind anticipated the incredible wave of Americans that would migrate to California. He recognized that agriculture would play the most important role in the development of the state, an even more important role than the cattle industry and the California Gold Rush itself. He actively championed the farmer's cause in the U. S, Congress and organized for farmers' rights in California. John was an incredibly accomplished gentleman farmer in his own right. Bidwell purchased a chunk of land at Chico, California known as the Dickey Spanish Land Grant. Mr. Dickey was one of Bidwell's first friends in California. In 1849, Dickey sold this 22,000-acre grant to Bidwell. He retained the original Spanish name: Rancho Arroyo Chico and soon after began developing this property into a huge farming enterprise. Over the years, Bidwell added more land to his holdings and built an impressive mansion there that still stands to this day. Through the course of his long life, John Bidwell explored the wide variety of fruits, vegetables and grains that would grow in the rich soils of Arroyo Chico. He planted vast fields of grain, more than 100,000 fruit and nut trees, plus 200 acres of grapes. He is also credited with introducing the Casaba melon to Anglo people. John Bidwell is honored as the founding father of Chico.

If ever there was a saint in the early history of California, it was John Bidwell. Between the years of 1850 and 1900, more than a million Americans would become sons and daughters of the Golden State. California's vast Sacramento Valley and Bidwell's Chico settlement produced a substantial share of the crops needed to sustain such an immense population explosion. Bidwell's forethought and political savvy prepared the state well for this massive influx of emigrants. He was truly a giant influence in the long-term vision of California's development.

John's wife, Annie Ellicott Kennedy, is also a fascinating figure. A devoted Presbyterian from a well to do Washington, D.C. political family; she became engaged to Bidwell while he was a California Congressional Representative in Washington, D. C. Soon after their marriage in 1868, John and his bride said farewell to Washington forever more. He carried Annie west to his Arroyo Chico Rancho. Annie Bidwell soon became known as a gracious woman of the socialite set at Chico, but she was not your average debutante. She became a formidable political activist in her own right. Annie was one of the first Californians to propose the cause of the suffragettes and was a passionate and vocal supporter of the temperance movement. Annie Kennedy-Bidwell was surely a brilliant light walking beside her husband and his vision of California's future. Unfortunately, this dynamic couple was never blessed with children.

An additional noteworthy fact is that, unlike the majority of settlers in the region, Bidwell vigilantly protected the Mechoopda Band of the Maidu Tribe. These tribal people inhabited the Rancho Arroyo Chico lands for thousands of years before the coming of the white man. The Maidu worked and lived on his ranch, receiving protection and comparatively fair wages for their labor. Other tribes surrounding Bidwell's lands were systematically murdered or sold as slaves by the incoming settlers. John tried to employ as many of the local natives as he could, but he could not protect all of them. Those that survived the pioneer's insatiable desire for land were rounded up and forced to walk to the reservation at Covelo of Mendocino County. Many barefooted and ill-prepared natives did not survive this forced march. It was a smaller version of *The Cherokee Trail of Tears*. Bidwell was aware of these events, and it troubled him deeply, but he was powerless to stop all of the insanity. He did what he could.

After Bidwell made his fortune in gold and retired from military and political affairs, he occupied his golden years as a political advisor, author and philanthropist. He greatly admired John Muir and his early attempts to preserve the most sacred lands of California from the axe, pick and plow. Some say as Bidwell wrote his memoirs and contemplated his long life, he was somewhat disappointed with the way emigration had affected California. He sorely longed for the frontier days, the time before the discovery of gold when the land was still pristine and the true Native Sons and Daughters of California roamed freely with him down the path of peace.



Annie & John Bidwell Camping Out

General John Bidwell was laid to rest at the dawn of a new century that was not his own. May he rest in peace. Oddly, after Bidwell died, Annie's deep conviction of the Christian faith drove her to destroy the Mechoopda ceremonial buildings located on the Arroyo Chico Rancho. Her deceased husband had loved these natives and respected their spiritual ways. This blatant disregard of John's wishes by his widow seems a bit harsh from an otherwise benevolent woman. She was determined to convert them all to the Presbyterian faith despite her late husband's wishes.

The Springer plot thickens here a bit. The 1860 Butte County census enumerates Joseph Suits, his wife Louisa Springer-Suits and children as residents of Chico. Remember...Louisa is the eldest Springer daughter who crossed the Springer goods at the Mississippi for her father. Also living in the Suits household in Chico were J. W. Lindsey and family. What Joe Suits and Mr. Lindsey were doing for work is unknown. Were they working for Bidwell developing his huge farming operation? We know little else

about Joseph and Louisa's life at Chico, but something was amiss. Louisa apparently left Joseph a few short years after the 1860 Census. We have no idea what split this couple up, but a marriage certificate from 1864 shows that Louisa Springer-Suits remarried to Amos Ingram of Covelo. She is listed in the 1870 census of Mendocino County as: "Louisa Springer-Housekeeper" along with "N.O. Springer-Houseman." Surely, this N.O. Springer, age twenty-two, is Louisa's youngest brother, Nelson Leroy. The circumstances of Louisa's life and death after this time-period are still unknown to us and her burial site is yet a mystery. We continue to search for clues.

The remaining scraps of a faded old letter written by Ephraim Harrison in the late 1860's to his mother, tells of a request by Joe Suits that Ephraim and Isabel Springer-Harrison take responsibility for the teenaged Lois Ann. She was the daughter of Joe and Louisa Suits. Lois is the Springer-Suits child that was born in the Utah Territory in 1853 on the way to California. The young Lois Ann Suits would later be enumerated in the 1870 census of Lake County. Indeed, she was living in the household of her Aunt Isabel and Uncle Ephraim near to the mining community of Knoxville, California. This living arrangement would not last long though. In November of 1870, Lois Ann married a Lower Lake stonemason named Thomas Henry Smith. Four years later, we believe Mr. Smith hand carved the unique headstone designs that still adorn the burial site of his brides' great-grandmother and granduncle Loisanna Green-Springer-Scarf and William Baker Green. These gravesites are located at the Herndon Pioneer Cemetery in Lower Lake, California.

The Suits residence at Chico is just the first possible connection we will speak of regarding Bidwell and the Green-Springer kinfolk. In the following years, John Bidwell's kin and William Baker Green's family would be tied together by marriage. These two connections are just the first in a series of Springer/Green family ties that include a few other frontiersmen and politicians involved with Sutter's Fort and Old Sacramento.

## GRANVILLE COMMODORE PERRY SWIFT



Granville Swift is another Sutter's Fort associate involved with the Springer-Green Clan. He was undoubtedly one of the most colorful characters in Anglo California history. Granville descends from the eldest sister of Daniel Boone. His American Swift patriarch is Flower Swift I, born 1705 in Baltimore, Maryland. Flower Swift's grandson was Lieutenant Colonel Flower Swift II, born 1750 in Bethesda, Maryland. He married into the Scotch/Quaker family of Mary Bedsaul. Their son, William Thomas Swift was born 1798 in Virginia. He married into the Quaker line of Rachel Boone-Walker. Rachel was the granddaughter of Sarah Boone-Wilcoxon. Sarah was the eldest sister of America's beloved frontiersman Daniel Boone. In other words, Daniel Boone was Granville Swift's Great-Grand-Uncle.

Rachel Boone and her husband Thomas Swift welcomed Granville to the world in 1821 at Whitley County, Kentucky. He was one of twelve children and obviously grew up around the Boone legend. There is no doubt that both sides of Granville's family were among the true patriots of America's Colonial Era and beyond. Around 1830, young Swift moved with his family from the Kentucky homestead to Missouri. In 1835, after his mother died, it is known Granville was taken in by his uncle, the famous frontiersman Nathaniel

Walker. Nathaniel honed his nephew's hunting and trapping skills on an excursion to the Rocky Mountains. Granville was fourteen years old at the time. We would suggest that together, they experienced the last trapping days of the waning Rocky Mountain Rendezvous Era. Alas, the times of plentiful beaver and the passion for the beaver hat fashion was soon to fade away. We have found no specific mention yet regarding how many times Granville may have crossed the plains as he grew into a man, nor when he parted company with his uncle Nat. We do know he came to California by the age of twenty-one. Afterwards, young Swift made a few trips back to Missouri to collect family members and carry them west.

In 1842, Mr. Swift first arrived at Sacramento in the company of the Kelsey Family Wagon Train. He made his initial stand in California near Orland and made a living selling hides and game to John Sutter's Trading Post. He soon became famous throughout the land for the range and accuracy of his Kentucky Long Rifle. It is said he could reload this bulky weapon in a blur. According to Barbara Warner, in her great book on the Bear Flaggers and Their Heritage, Granville was deeply involved in the revolt against Mexican rule. He served as Captain of Company C in the revolt. Granville was briefly captured by the Mexican "Californios" in a skirmish and they confiscated his Kentucky Long Rifle. Family tradition has it that after the revolt ended, Granville traveled to Mexico and retrieved it. We have yet to see anything written about this trip.





During the gold rush, Swift made a fortune in gold at the Bidwell Bar on the Feather River. Estimates are that he took as much as half a million dollars in gold out of the Feather. Today, in twenty first century currency, that would be a staggering fifteen million dollars or more. Folks claimed he could literally "smell gold." He even minted his own octagon shaped coins. A few still exist and are highly prized.

Swift had a special relationship with the Rocky Creek band of Wintun Nation. Swift historians tell a noteworthy story of the Wintu while they worked for Granville at the Bidwell Bar on the Feather River. The fact is these Wintun braves were responsible for the slaughter of around fifty Lake Pomo Indians. This macabre event would later have devastating repercussions for California's tribes and the Kelsey clan.

Andrew Kelsey and Charles Stone had set up a cattle ranch in the Lake County area and enslaved the Pomo of the Big Valley area while they were at it. It's well known the Kelsey's treated this tribe terribly. Andrew and his brother Ben Kelsey took several Lake Pomo braves to work beside Swift's Grindstones at the Bidwell Bar gold claim. The Kelsey's soon discovered that these two tribes had a problem with one another. All mining stopped as these rival tribes confronted each other. After three days of battle, only a few Pomo survived, scattered in the woods. The Kelsey brothers returned to Lake County without any tribal members. This was the last straw for the Lake Pomo. They executed Stone and Kelsey shortly thereafter for the Feather River Massacre and several other immoral betrayals these two irreverent pioneers perpetrated on the People of the Lake. In the aftermath of the Kelsey and Stone executions, Lieutenant Lyons and a detachment of the U.S. Army rode up to the Lake County area and ruthlessly murdered all but a few of the women, children and elders they found camped on Clearlake's "Bloody Island." These Indians were not the same band of Pomo that had killed Stone and Kelsey. This horrific event, in which many women and children were brutally *brained and bayoneted* to save ammunition, was an action meant to avenge Stone and Kelsey's deaths. The senseless bloodshed would continue for years to come.

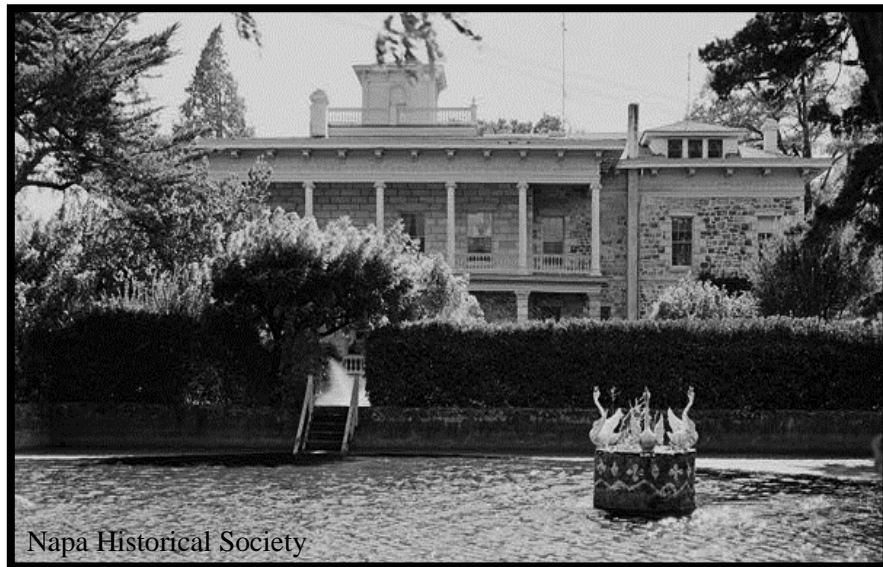
General John Bidwell also alludes to the character of Stone and Kelsey in his memoirs. He claims that these two men who traveled to California with him, stole his horses and pack animals from a picket line set outside of Sutter's Fort. Bidwell tracked these horse thieves all the way to the Oregon border. At the time, John had no idea who he was tracking until he caught up with them. Charles Stone and Andrew Kelsey vehemently denied the charge of theft and were opposed to allowing Bidwell to inspect the Kelsey herd. They were bound for sale in Oregon. It was not until big brother Ben Kelsey intervened that Andrew Kelsey and Charles Stone relented. Obviously, from the tone of Bidwell's account, Andy and Charlie were a scandalous duo, deserving of their fate at the hands of the Pomo. California history would surely have been much different had Bidwell met a violent death at the hands of these unscrupulous men over this horse-stealing incident. By rights, the Kelsey's could and should have been hung on the spot. Again, had that occurred, California's history would be quite different. Now, we return to the story of Granville Swift and his association with the Green-Spring Clan.



After the Bear Flag Revolt and the Gold Rush, Swift became a formidable Sonoma County cattle rancher due in no small part to his friendship with General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo. This powerful and popular Mexican General was the Supreme Mexican Authority of the territory from Petaluma to Ukiah back then. In 1843, Alta California's Mexican Governor Micheltorena granted Vallejo 80,000 acres of what is now the Suisun and San Pablo Bay Area. Vallejo was awarded another 70,000 acres in the Santa Rosa Valley, up to and including a portion that would later become Lake County. Another Lake County area grant went to Vallejo's brother Salvador who leased it to the Kelsey's for their fateful cattle ranch. These huge grants were originally awarded to Mariano Vallejo for his service to Mexico as Commanding General of the Alta California Army and his efforts to put down the virtually non-existent Indian "uprisings."

It was 1855 when Granville Swift, his brother William and his Kentucky cousin Franklin Sears bought a fifteen thousand-acre tract of Vallejo's Sonoma Grant. This land is in the area known today as Sears Point. In the following few years, Swift and company would purchase other adjoining lands and turn this vast bayside property into a thriving cattle ranch. Granville built a fine three-story mansion there which he dubbed "Temelec"... and life was good. Granville put a great deal of time and money into this home to make his wife Eliza comfortable. Estimates claim the cost of construction and decoration of Temelec was two hundred fifty thousand nineteenth century dollars. This fabulous hacienda even had hot and cold running water, a rarity in those days for sure. Temelec still stands to this day, recognized as an important historic site.

### Temelec Hall



The Rocky Creek Wintu also rode with Granville to Sonoma. These braves worked as "vaqueros" at the Temelec Ranch. An opportunistic yellow journalism account claims terrible abuse of these Indians at the hands of Swift, but these claims are baseless. Although living among many slave owners during his time in Missouri, there appears to be no record of Granville or his father ever being slave owners. The Swifts obviously honored their Quaker Heritage which forbid this practice. These Wintun warriors would later ride with Granville to work his ranch in Green Valley. Their loyalty to him is well documented. It is also said Granville fathered a male child by a Wintu woman, but we are unsure if this child is included in the family genealogy.

Unfortunately, Granville suffered great financial losses due to investments in James Fair's unbridled attempts to profit off the Comstock Lode. General Vallejo lost his shirt in this ill-fated endeavor too. Captain Swift was generous to a fault with his friends and freely lent out money he would never see again. In 1863, due to this combination of financial fiascos and lavish extravagances of his wife Eliza, he was forced to sell his grande Sonoma ranch. Granville had no choice but to move the family to Green Valley of neighboring Solano County. He bought a relatively modest ranch there from his old eccentric friend, Matthew Harbin. In 1870, hardship struck again. Granville endured a heartbreaking divorce from Eliza Jane Tate. Her fascination with San Francisco's Nob Hill society overtook her. She obviously preferred silk, lace and stockings to buckskin, fringe and cowboy boots.

During and after all of these misfortunes, Swift maintained a rustic cabin near Napa's little community of Zem-Zem between Knoxville and the Berryessa Valley. Nelson Leroy Springer was known to be living here during this time-period. He worked for the Owen family as a houseman at their Sulfur Springs Hotel. Certainly, Nels served Granville a beer or two there. Mr. Swift continued to prospect in this remote area in an attempt to recoup his financial losses. Tax records show he did indeed regain some of his vast fortune in the process. Granville is credited with discovering mineral deposits and filing claims on a few mines in the Vada District of Zem-Zem and beyond. In 1874, he confided in the family that he had located "a rich silver deposit" (likely quicksilver) near Zem-Zem. Vague references to a few claims are on record but nothing specific. There were other Swift discoveries near and including Lake County's famous Reddington Mercury Mine (Knoxville), but no claim on this discovery was ever filed by Swift. A real shame because as it turned out, the Reddington was a real bonanza.

Family members and prospectors have continued to search in vain for the elusive Swift quicksilver mine for over a century. Others have scoured his property for the gold said to be buried there. Some folks are still on the lookout for his octagon shaped gold coins. A wooden chest with Granville's initials carved into it and full of his minted coins was discovered in a wall of his Green Valley ranch during a re-model after the 1906 earthquake.

Mr. Swift was a well-known and highly regarded figure in the Lake-Napa County area until his untimely and suspicious death in 1875. Napa County authorities claim that Granville Commodore Perry Swift died from a fall off a mule into a steep canyon. Family tradition disputes this claim. It is whispered two bullet holes were the actual cause. Not long before his demise, Granville received a death threat involving extortion. According to the great book, "Captain Granville Perry Swift" by Billie Hobart, the account of Frank Twichell is the accurate portrayal of this great man's death. Frank's motivation could be suspect, but most feel his story rings true.

Mr. Twichell states he accompanied his good friend part of the way down the trail outside of the small community of Zem-Zem in Napa's north-eastern outback. Frank said that Mr. Swift had borrowed an ornery pack mule not used to carrying the heavy load of both man and gear. In addition, the reins were old, brittle, and the saddle loose. Although Granville was said to be an excellent horseman, with the ability to pick a coin off the ground at a full gallop, he was also suffering from an old leg wound sustained in battle years before. It never seemed to heal. To make matters worse, the cantankerous mule had not been ridden in a while. When Swift and Twichell parted company on the trail outside Zem-Zem, Frank warned Granville to be careful, as it appeared the tack and mule carrying Swift were a potential problem. A few days later, when Twichell returned to the same trail, he talks of viewing a mule dragging a saddle. Upon further investigation, Frank discovered his dear friend dead at the bottom of a steep cliff. He stated Mr. Swift's head was apparently bashed up from a collision with a tree limb. Frank also says that his neck was broken. It seems that Granville did not die immediately. Twichell states that "he dragged himself for a ways" and was found with his head cradled in the crook of his elbow. The great frontiersman Captain Granville Commodore Perry Swift is buried in the pioneer cemetery at Rockville, of Solano County, California. May he rest in peace despite his untimely demise. He was one of the last true frontier mountain men, a Bear Flagger, friend to the Rocky Creek Indians and an extremely successful prospector and cattle rancher. A decade after Granville's death, the Swift and Springer-Harrison kin would be tied together by marriage.

## STEPHEN HITE

Stephen Hite seems to be a somewhat unheralded historical figure in the scenario of Sutter's Fort and Old Sacramento. He was also a big influence on members of the Springer-Green clan. Mr. Hite was a former neighbor to members of John Sutter's extended family during their mutual days of living in Wyandot County, Ohio. This time period was before John Sutter came to California via Hawaii to set up his New Helvetia settlement. It is known that Stephen received his formal education in Ohio, walking several miles a day to his classes. Sutter may have met Stephen while visiting his family in Ohio or learned of him upon their recommendation. In any event, someone in the Sutter family was impressed with the intelligence and tenacity of this young man. Sutter later appealed to Stephen Hite, requesting he come to California and assist in solving the many problems associated with his settlement. In 1849, Stephen answered that call. He traveled to Sacramento via the oceanic route around The Cape. Mr. Hite set up the first leather manufacturing company of Sacramento soon after his arrival. Saddles and saddletrees were his field of expertise. In 1853, he married the Springer brother's elder sister Sarah Ellen. This marriage was the third of widower Stephen Hite, Sarah's first and only marriage. In the following decade, this Springer girl would go on to bare six children as a result of this marriage. Their names were Charles Puckney, Oliver Walcott, Frank Lesley, Isabelle Alma, Hilda Charlotta and Elizabeth Ann Hite.

When not working at his saddle company, Stephen Hite kept his eyes on the future of Sacramento, inspired by his friend John Sutter's plans for New Helvetia. Stephen did not make a large fortune in gold, as did Bidwell and Swift. Instead, he turned much of his attention to the formidable problems associated with the destructive floods that ravaged Sacramento. He became an early city supervisor and was a proponent of raising the grade of the city in order to circumvent the floodwaters that periodically created so much damage and disease. The city fathers at first opposed this "folly," but Stephen eventually prevailed. The Great Flood of 1861-'62 would seal the deal, but in the process, caused Mr. Hite great financial and personal losses. Stephen owned a farm in the "Pocket District" of Sacramento. The floods ruined his crops, which forced him to give up his farm. The effects of this destructive flood took a toll on the Hite family long after the waters subsided. Family tragedy & illness followed. Despite all this hardship, Stephen somehow carried on and saw the flood project through. He actually labored at this momentous engineering feat as a surveyor.



California State Library Collection

Sacramento Flood of 1862



During all of this flooding and disaster in 1862, Stephen and his son David Thomas Hite, (a child from one of his previous marriages) filled a U.S. Army order for five-thousand saddles with the assistance of San Quentin convict labor. This feat was a remarkable accomplishment for the times. Although not yet documented, it seems likely the saddles were ordered by the government for use in the Civil War. Did some of these saddles go to Hite's friend, the great Brigadier General John Bidwell, Commander of the California Militia? Surely, the Springer boys rode in saddles made by their brother-in-law. Could a Hite Civil War Era saddle still exist?

In November of 1863, tragedy struck again when Stephens' beloved wife, Sarah Ellen Springer-Hite died of "consumption." She was twenty-nine years of age. We wonder if the flood of '62 caused her to contract some form of water-borne disease. Her young son Frank had already passed away in April of a "spinal disease," so say the Sutter Cemetery Records. Also, Stephen and Sarah lost their five-year-old son Charles to diphtheria three years earlier. To lose his wife and two sons in short order must have been devastating for Stephen. Both Sarah and her two young sons are buried in the historic Sacramento City Cemetery, as were Sarah's unfortunate father George and sister Phebe a decade before.

After this tragic multitude of Springer-Hite family fatalities, Stephen returned to Ohio with the surviving children. They were raised by his sister, Dr. Ann Hite. It is said that he was concerned for the safety of the remaining children, as the Civil War had broken out. Sedition was in the air in California and the grieving widower wanted no part of it. Stephen Hite continued to travel back and forth from Ohio to the west coast after all this and we currently know little else of his life. He lived to the ripe old age of ninety-two and passed away during a trip to Idaho. Two of his older sons from a previous marriage reportedly settled there. May Sarah Ellen Springer, Stephen Hite and their children rest in peace.

# BROTHERS IN ARMS AND A BROTHER-IN-LAW

## EPHRAIM HARRISON

Van Rensselaer Springer's experience of handling oxen, wagons and livestock at the Michigan family farm, as well as during the plains crossing, led him to seek work as a teamster or drover at Sacramento. Or was he hauling brick made at the elusive family brick yard? Possibly, Van and his younger brother George worked as teamsters on the Sacramento flood prevention project with Mr. Hite. Is this how their sister Sarah Springer met Stephen Hite? Another fellow by the name of Ephraim Harrison worked as a teamster on the construction of the foundation of the capitol building. Did Van and George Springer work as teamsters on this project too? Is this how Isabel Springer became familiar with Ephraim and eventually married him?

Ephraim Harrison is undoubtedly an unheralded figure in the scenario of California's early history. It is known that this brave young man led many pioneers across the plains during the decade of the 1850's. Harrison family tradition states that he crossed the plains seven times during this period. This is quite an impressive accomplishment considering. This would indicate three complete round trips in a decade as well as the first trip from his home state of Michigan. What great adventures and remarkable people Mr. Harrison met with while *making the crossing* so many times. We hope some of his adventures are recorded in pioneer journals of the era.

We would most certainly like to expand upon the life of Mr. Harrison even more, but besides family tradition and some standard public documents, alas, little of the personal papers of this accomplished man have survived. Many of the best stories of Ephraim come from Springer-Harrison family tradition and of course, the lovely Blanch Stroop. According to her son Dock, there was an old steamer trunk belonging to Ephraim, which was stored at the Harrison ranch in El Dorado County. Ephraim's son Marvin purchased this particular ranch from the widow Nancy Jane Green-Thomas shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. She was a daughter of William Baker Green and had crossed the plains with her family as an infant. Nancy Jane married a man with the surname of Thomas. Ephraim simply referred to this man as "The Missourian." We know nothing else of him. Nancy sold the Thomas ranch to Cousin Marvin after her husband passed. She moved to idyllic Sonoma to live out her days.

Ephraim Harrison's old steamer trunk was stored at Marvin's ranch and is said to have contained a fiddle or two, some documents, photographs and journals. We would give anything to be able to transcribe and publish a diary from one of Mr. Harrison's many tours across the plains as a teamster and guide. Alas, Mr. Harrison's personal effects contained in this trunk were lost in a fire at the ranch many years ago. One Harrison descendant, a young Blanche Stroop was there at the time of the fire. This brave girl was able to save some of the Harrison possessions including two large portraits of Ephraim and Isabel just before the entire ranch house was consumed.

It appears that Mr. Harrison had a formal education. He could read and write and was a man of many talents. Ephraim's father Nathan had many skills too and it is said he could master any trade. Obviously, Nathan passed these attributes onto his son. In turn, Ephraim was undoubtedly a great mentor to the Springer brothers. There is no doubt that he taught the Springer boys many skills as they came of age. Among the talents credited to Mr. Harrison, he played the fiddle. We surmise that through his sage influence, the Springer boys developed their own musical skills. Reportedly, they could all play the strings. Harrison is described as a handsome man of short and stocky stature. His hardy fortitude resembled his Scottish ancestors in size and appearance. Ephraim was a physically powerful man, which would have been a great attribute for a teamster who handled heavy freight and large beasts of burden such as oxen, draft horses and mules. He definitely enjoyed the challenge of the heavy load. This man was highly respected and dearly loved by many, greatly feared by an unlucky few.

During the first half of the 1860's, we know from family tradition that Ephraim was a teamster in Sacramento. During this era, they were beginning to build the impressive state capitol building. Again, by Harrison family tradition, Ephraim was known to have worked on the foundation of this massive undertaking. As mentioned before, Stephen Hite worked on the flood prevention project where the grade of *Old Town* was raised. Possibly Mr. Harrison and even Van and George Springer might have worked together on these two historic Sacramento construction projects. We have no documented evidence of this, just family tradition and timing.

We know the settlers of Sutter's Fort and the village of Sacramento suffered greatly due to the unpredictable nature of the great Sacramento River. The early pioneers dealt with this situation as best they could. During one disastrous flood in Sacramento, a Harrison family story goes that Ephraim observed a house floating down river and launched a boat to investigate. He was looking for stranded survivors but found none. However, he did notice an undisturbed pot of stew still sitting on the wood stove of this floating wreck. Lo and behold, both the stove and stew were still warm! It is said that the Harrison's made a fine meal of the recovered stew that evening.

We also suspect that the Springer's, Green's and Harrison's had family ties back in Michigan, but we have no documented evidence of such a relationship. We do know that these pioneer families lived in close proximity to each other in Michigan. The Van Buren County Census of 1850 even shows a Harrison family living in close proximity to William Baker Green. A relationship has not been confirmed. Ephraim descends from Nathan and Anna Botkin-Harrison. Nathan was the son of Judge Bazel Harrison. Bazel was one of the earliest settlers of the area and became the first judge of Kalamazoo, Michigan. By his own biographical account, Bazel claims to descend from the colonial Virginia Harrison's and the bloodline of William, a brother to Benjamin Harrison. Benjamin was the fifth patriot to sign the Declaration of Independence. He was a close friend of George Washington. This Harrison bloodline going back to William is somewhat lacking in documentation and is currently under the scrutiny of Harrison family genealogists. It is said by some that William was a black sheep of the Harrison clan due to a Negro child borne to him out of wedlock. Therefore, he may have been banished and stricken from the records. This family dilemma may yet be solved through DNA testing.

Patriot Benjamin Harrison's youngest son, the brash William Henry Harrison, was a "Child of the Revolution." He gained his fame in America's battles of 1812 with the combined British and Native American forces in what would later become the Midwestern States. William Henry Harrison's arch nemesis was the eloquent Shawnee chieftain, Tecumseh. This vigilant native leader sought to unite the eastern tribes to thwart the colonialist's attempts to expand ever westward. Tecumseh was a powerful orator and could move his audience through the gamut of emotions during a single speech. Therefore, he had many followers, but not all of the eastern tribes would agree with this great Shawnee leader. Tecumseh would not prevail in his ultimate goal to push the white man back into the Atlantic Ocean, due in part to the bad blood between the Shawnee and some of the other tribes. Pride would be their undoing. Unfortunately, hard feelings among these natives went back for generations. This inability to put aside their differences was surely a key factor in their defeat. Tecumseh aligned his forces with the British during the War of 1812. That decision would be a fatal move on his part. Fierce battles ensued.

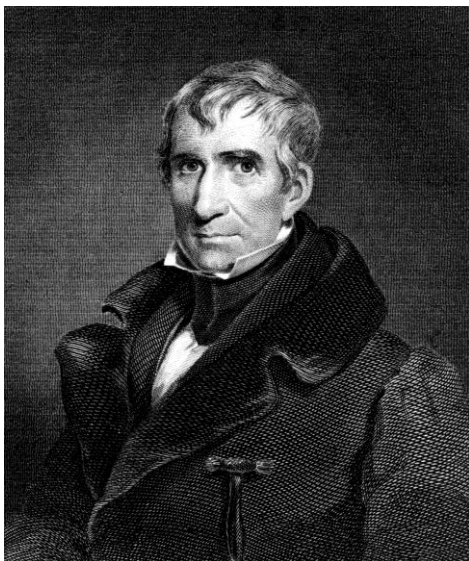


It is said the great Tecumseh cursed William Harrison as he lay mortally wounded in one of the final battles of this brutal conflict. In the following years, six of William Harrison's ten children would die. The other four would see their father become the ninth President of the United States only to see him die too, only one month after taking office. William Harrison's long winded, two-hour inaugural speech in a blustery winter rainstorm without an overcoat is said to have led to his speedy demise by way of pneumonia ... and pride.

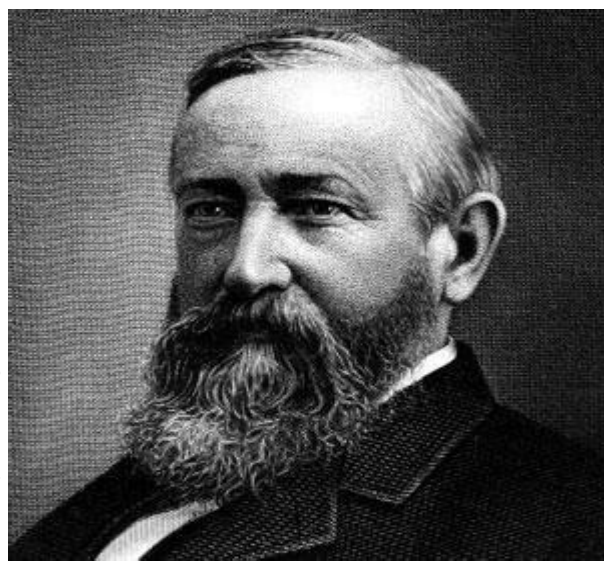
Benjamin, who was President William Henry Harrison's grandson, became our twenty-third president. He once visited California by train. We can only wonder if Ephraim had the opportunity to say hello to his famous cousin. Obviously, this California Harrison clan springs from the essence of our founding fathers. A portrait of Ephraim shows an uncanny resemblance to the colonial Harrisons.

Ephraim Harrison, his accomplishments and heritage must be seriously considered by California historians. He brought many early eastern emigrants safely to the west and was surely a well-known figure amongst the early prospectors and settlers of Sacramento, Lake & Napa Counties. The merchants who supplied goods to the gold prospectors would have had much contact with this tenacious teamster. Lake and Napa Counties undoubtedly benefitted from his presence. Ephraim Harrison and Stephen Hite are little appreciated... until now.

You may question why we have included Ephraim and all these prominent Gold Rush Era figures in this manuscript. The Springer, Green and Harrison kinfolk would go on to marry into the clans of John Bidwell and Granville Swift. We have mentioned Sarah Springer's marriage to John Sutter's friend, Stephen Hite. Anna Harrison, the daughter of Ephraim and Isabel Springer-Harrison, would marry William Swift, the son of Granville. A branch of William Baker Green's family, in essence, married into both the Swift and Bidwell clans. Granville's granddaughter Juanita Swift would marry Bidwell's grandnephew Stanley. In 1883, Juanita's sister Ethelyn Irene Swift would marry Walter Green Sr., the grandson of William Baker Green. These matrimonial unions would officially tie the Bidwell, Green, Harrison, Springer and Swift family bloodlines together. These children and grandchildren of Sacramento's legendary pioneers were undoubtedly woven together as a result of business and personal relationships their parents and grandparents cultivated, perhaps as far back as the family homesteads in Michigan, Illinois & Ohio but most definitely during the California Gold Rush Era and beyond.



President William Henry Harrison



President Benjamin Harrison

Library of Congress





Ephraim & Isabel Harrison

## LOWER LAKE/KNOXVILLE YEARS

Ephraim Harrison married the Springer brothers beautiful and high-spirited sister Isabel in 1862 at Copperopolis. Two children and a few years after this marriage began, Isabel was diagnosed with malaria. It was recommended that she should move from the balmy Sacramento area to a drier climate. They chose to relocate near to the quicksilver mining community of Knoxville, California. This move would provide the arid climate and medicinal hot springs that would hopefully aide Isabel's recovery. Ephraim could make a decent living working as a teamster for the booming mercury mines of the area or perhaps drive a stagecoach. We wonder if Granville Swift might have encouraged Ephraim to move there with tales of his most recent gold and quicksilver discoveries.

The first official record we have of Ephraim at Knoxville is his voter's registration; "The Great Registry of 1867". This was the same year that the widowed Loisanna Green-Springer purchased a home at Lower Lake. Ephraim and Isabel kept a home near mother Loisanna for a time but would set up a farm closer to Knoxville in the following years. Thankfully, Isabel recovered from the dreaded "Sacramento Fever."

Although the Springer brothers lost their father when they were so young, they were privileged to have personally known such outstanding men such as Ephraim Harrison, William Baker Green, Granville Commodore Perry Swift, Stephen Hite and the whole Sutter's Fort crew. The boys were certainly in good company. We wonder if they had a sense of the history in the making.



Reddington Mine Near Knoxville – 1870's

The mercury mines of Lake and Napa County sprung to life when quicksilver was in high demand, during the smattered remains of the Gold Rush Era on through the entirety of the huge silver boom of Nevada's Comstock days. Previously, much of the quicksilver used in the California Gold Rush was imported from Spain and elsewhere. It was a precious commodity required in the gold and silver mining process. The old mining community of Knoxville was situated a couple of days ride northwest of Sacramento by horseback. It was first created as a Lake County township, torn from the grasp of Napa County in 1869. This famous but long-gone mining town was located about twenty miles outside of Lower Lake, California by way of the Morgan Valley Road. Old Knoxville, seated between the rugged Bear and Mayacamus Mountain Ranges, sat high on a small plateau bordering Napa and Lake County. It is unique area created eons ago when an ancient seabed was thrust up by the ever-shifting tectonic plates of California. An area rich in cinnabar, microscopic gold particles and other rare minerals was thus exposed.

In addition to quicksilver, a century after Knoxville & the Reddington Mine was established; tons of gold would be extracted from this same area by the Homestake Mining Company using innovative, modern methods and open pit mining technology. The ever-present Harrison Ranch adjoins this site. Granville Swift had been on the right track. He must have smelled the microscopic gold of Knoxville, but he just could not see it nor excavate it in any great quantity. Back in the day, it only assayed as "minute gold." How frustrating that must have been for Granville. If he only could have lived long enough to figure a way to extract it himself.

Mr. Harrison ran freight around the Knoxville area for rest his career as far as we know. Family tradition states that on at least one occasion, he transported those heavy iron flasks of quicksilver directly from Knoxville to the gold country by way of a sturdy wagon and stout team. This was a long and dangerous trip that only a well-armed and adept teamster would even attempt. It boggles the mind to even envision such a difficult journey. Harrison family tradition also states that Ephraim enjoyed his teamster duties and hauling for the various mines, but the Williams family of Mendocino County (relatives and neighbors of the Begley's) states that Ephraim personally despised mining and "refused to do so." Ephraim Harrison would go on to make a stand in the Knoxville area that would continue on until present times, involving six generations of descendants. To this day, an area near to old Knoxville is known as the Harrison Ranch and is still titled to the family. After living in the Knoxville area for more than three decades, Ephraim and Isabel spent their golden years living in picturesque Old Monticello in Napa's Berryessa Valley. Mr. Harrison enjoyed a productive life and lived to the ripe old age of eighty-seven.

Mr. Ephraim Harrison died in 1910 and his beloved wife Isabel passed on in 1921 at the age of seventy-nine. They were originally buried in the pioneer cemetery of Napa's Monticello. In 1956, before the Berryessa Valley became a reservoir, the Harrison's and other early pioneers of the area were disinterred. The couple's remains were moved from Monticello up the road to the More family plot in the Spanish Flats Cemetery of Napa County. May Ephraim and Isabel rest in peace. They surely rank among Northern California's grandest pioneer couples.

## THE SPRINGER BROTHERS

Now that you have some background on a few of the men and women who undoubtedly influenced the young lives of the Springer children, we begin to lay out the adult lives of Nelson Leroy, George Davidson and Van Rensselaer Springer. We do so in the fashion of one biography at first, as it has become apparent that these boys remained close well into adulthood. For a time, the Springer brothers were similar to the three musketeers in many respects, except that their weapons of choice were not the swashbuckler's sword, the dirk, nor the thundering blunderbuss. The Bowie Knife, Colt's Peacemaker and Spencer's Carbine would have been their early favorites. They were rough and tumble boys, swaddled in the pelts of the frontier mountain man generation. Ephraim Harrison, William Green and Granville Swift taught them well, especially in the realms of folk music, hunting, trapping, mining, teaming, farming and stock raising. What a fascinating trio these brothers must have been.

In all probability, young Nelson Springer left Sacramento in 1867 and went to Knoxville with brother-in-law Ephraim, sister Isabel and mother Loisanna when they all moved to the Lake County area. The 1870 Knoxville Census shows Nels worked as a "Laborer." Oddly, he is also listed in the Mendocino County Census that year as a "Houseman." He was twenty-two years of age. Nels brother Van was thirty-one and was likely running cattle all over gods' creation. We do know he was in the Lower Lake area off and on during this time. Delinquent Lake County Tax Records show he left some cattle with a Lower Lake rancher and never retrieved them.

Brother George D. Springer was around twenty-six. We surmise George was also in the Lower Lake area, until the summer of 1868. The ledger of Lower Lake's Miles Saloon shows he ran periodic tabs there. After that, he worked as a teamster and wagon master during the latter part of 1868 and on into 1869. This statement of George's whereabouts comes from the Williams family. Accordingly, George Davidson Springer was working as a teamster supplying goods used for the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. This bit of Williams family lore is undocumented. Statements by the elusive Williams family recorded in the Begley family file of Mendocino County's Held-Poage



Miles Saloon – 1870's

repository say that George Davidson Springer was present at Promontory, Utah in 1869 when Leland Stanford sunk the historic golden spike that ceremoniously connected California to the east by way of train & telegraph. We wonder if Ephraim Harrison and Van Springer were working on this historic American project with George too. This Williams surname mentioned in the Begley file mysteriously pops up on occasion in the Springer family history as far back as Michigan. One version of Michigan's Van Buren County Census of 1850 shows a David Williams as residing with the Springers, but we have no other information on this relationship.

Nelson Springer (Nels) was at Knoxville in 1867, but his early employment there is a bit murky. Ephraim Harrison, who we know despised mining, would have steered young Nels away from the more dangerous work of the miner's pick and shovel, the instability of the sweltering, deep mine shafts and the blasting toxic fires of the cinnabar roasting retorts. This dangerous quicksilver trade was quite different from the back breaking but more lucrative process of gold mining. It was far more dangerous. Loisanna had lost her husband and so many children. She too would have implored her baby boy Nels not to seek employment in this high-risk trade.

A generation later, it is known by Harrison family tradition that Ephraim's son Marvin provided split wood for the retorts (furnaces) of the local quicksilver mines. Nels was doing the same type of work for Ephraim when he first came to Knoxville. A decade later, Nelson would return to this employ. The 1876 ledger of the Reddington Mine Company Store (now housed at the Lower Lake School House Museum) shows Nels was selling large amounts of cordwood to the mine and buying a lot of lumber from them too. On the other hand, young Nels was not as comfortable in the saddle as his older brothers. He basically grew into a man at Knoxville and became a saloon keeper & hotel manager. Ephraim and later his son Marvin purchased property around the area of Knoxville. Another tract of land located near the Harrison property was known as the "Springer Place." A record of a parcel purchased by Nelson Leroy Springer and/or his brother Van is on file. An early rustic map of the area shows this Springer property adjoining a Harrison farm close to Knoxville. Another nearby parcel was known as "Springer Flats." Local lore states there was a hotel conveniently located somewhere in the general area between the small mining community of Johnstown and the more well-known Knoxville. This roughly corresponds with the afore mentioned map and location of "The Springer Place" near Knoxville. The foundations of the buildings on this property were still present even up until thirty years ago, due to a 1980's Homestake Mine survey. Perhaps young Nels ran his own hotel and saloon on the Springer property. No formal documents regarding this establishment have been located, possibly due to a wild reputation. An obscure rustically hand drawn map and local scuttlebutt are our only clues. No family tradition makes mention of this. A curious fact is that at one time, this Springer property was owned by the well-known prospector John Mallally. John was the first husband of Anna Jane More. Anna Jane would later divorce John and marry Nelson Leroy Springer.

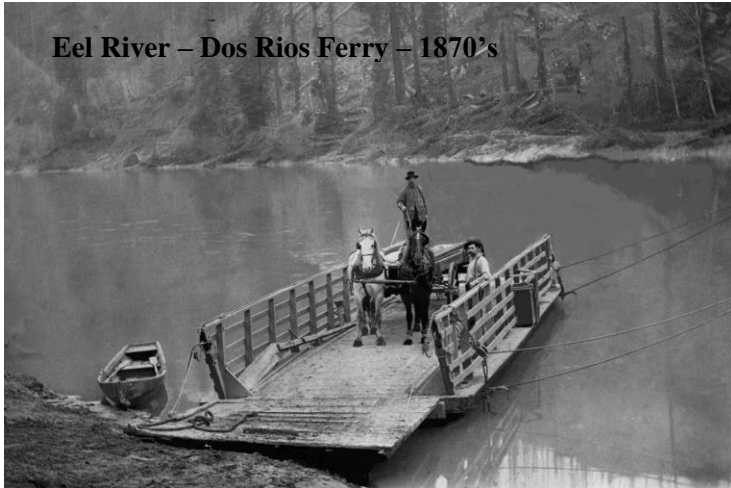
There is one Harrison family tale, which speaks of Nelson Leroy's bartending days. During this era, Knoxville employed experienced Mexican, Irish and Cornish miners. They may have worked together but were segregated into separate bunkhouses. The story goes that Nelson apparently "looked" a little too long at a pretty Mexican gal one day. The Spaniards took offense and cornered him in the saloon. Word went out to the Cornish miners that Nels was in trouble and "they came a runnin'." These rowdy miners discovered the young Nels with his back to the wall, swinging a bung starter at an angry mob of Mexicans to keep them at bay. It is said that a great brawl ensued in his defense. These Springer boys were scrappers. Another Harrison story talks of sister Isabel's difficulty in breaking the boys up while they were wrestling. She stated she even had to separate them with buckets of cold water on occasion. The Springer brothers were surely popular entertainers in the Knoxville area mining camps and saloons due to their musical abilities. Harrison family tradition states that all the boys could play stringed instruments. Could you imagine a fiddle-fest performed by the Springer brothers and Ephraim Harrison? It must have been quite the hoedown. This period of their lives would have been unforgettable for Ephraim and the Springer boys. The settlers of the area and local miners were especially grateful.

One great Harrison family story of Van Springer goes that he once came into the nearby town of Lower Lake to visit the handful of saloons that were present there at the time. One such bar of the day was known as "The Bucket of Blood." He toured these rather infamous establishments, playing his fiddle as he went. Later that night, after the saloons had closed, Van walked up and down the main street of Lower Lake playing his fiddle and serenading the sleepy inhabitants of this quaint little village before he headed home. Nobody complained much, but the local constable was not too thrilled. The fiddle had obviously become one of Van's greatest passions.

There is also a Harrison story of Van biting a chunk out of his horse's ear for balking on the dangerous Mount Murphy grade near Coloma. Another Harrison story talks of Van cooking and eating a rattlesnake for a bet of fifty bucks. His sister Isabel was furious with him for using one of her frying pans to do so and she promptly threw it away. Van had to buy her another. Isabel obviously had the Springer fire in her blood too! Alas, this cavalier lifestyle at Knoxville and Lower Lake lasted off and on for only a few short years.

## THE COVELO/EDEN VALLEY YEARS

According to the Mendocino Census of 1870, the Springer brothers moved near to the cattle community and Indian Reservation at Covelo (Round Valley) in Mendocino County. The Springer boys, or at least Van and George, must have been running cattle around Eden Valley and Covelo at this time. There, Van and George Springer had a great location for their livestock business. Still, by way of a strong, surefooted horse, they were only a day or so away from their family in Lake County. Their widowed mother Loisanna had recently remarried to William Scarf. Their surviving sisters were betrothed, so the boys could concentrate on their Covelo cattle business. Perhaps this move was due to Van's ambition to make his living as a cattleman come rain or shine.



Eel River – Dos Rios Ferry – 1870's

Humboldt State Collection

The Begley family file in the Held-Poage Library at Ukiah contains another statement by the Williams family, which indicates the Springer brothers operated a ferry service located on the Eel River between the Crawford Ranch and Eden Valley. We surmise this ferry was located in the area of Dos Rios where the two forks of the Eel River merge. This enterprise was known as the "Springer Ferry", according again to the elusive Williams family. Besides stock raising, George Davidson Springer might have prospected for gold in his spare time there. George carried this passion throughout his life. Records indicate that indeed, small pockets of the precious metal were discovered there.

As mentioned previously, the 1870 census shows Nels was apparently working as a "houseman" at a hotel in nearby Willits. He was living with his sister and her husband. Was this hotel owned by Mr. Ingram, the second husband of sister Louisa? What happened to the high-spirited Louisa after this time?

While living in Eden Valley, George and Van not only ran a ferry service, they had the option of selling livestock to the hungry miners of Lake County or running them south to the trains of Napa or Williams bound for San Francisco and beyond. The Springer Brothers would have no trouble selling cattle to the butchers in the valley who supplied settlers and prospectors with fresh meat, jerky, tallow and hides. Well-worn trails to Williams, Willits and Calistoga were native footpaths, used for eons before the Spaniards & Anglos came. By the early 1870's, these trails gave way to maintained toll roads running stagecoaches and cattle to the train railheads.

Round Valley (Covelo) and Eden Valley had a reputation as a hub for the Northern California cattle industry. It was a dubious reputation. Covelo was a hotbed for outlaws of all description. Even Black Bart reportedly sought a safe haven there after at least one of his four Mendocino County Wells Fargo heists. A key figure in the scenario of Covelo that requires mention was the ruthless George White. "The Cattle King of Mendocino County" was known to stop at nothing to buy up all the grazing land he could lay his hands on, by any means necessary. Oddly, a few Eden Valley settlers sold out to him as soon as their land patents cleared. Other settlers who got in White's way just "disappeared." His main henchman: Wailaki John, was said to have numerous notches carved in the butt of his pistol. Perhaps Van and George Springer were working with White at this time. More likely, they were working with the Begley family of Eden Valley, but they would have known the scandalous and dangerous George White. The Springer-Begley family connections to the well-known and highly respected Stephen Hite, Granville Swift and Ephraim Harrison may have kept the murderous George White at bay.

The hard to find book *Genocide and Vendetta* by Lynwood Carranco and Estle Beard tells of the horrific treatment perpetrated on the tribes of the Covelo Reservation at the corrupt hands of the local representative of the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. Superintendent Thomas Jefferson Henley and the infamous Asbill brothers (among others) perpetrated many hardships on these Northern California Tribes. Surely, Henley was in cahoots with George White. According to authors Beard and Carranco, Thomas Henley absconded with funds set aside by the federal government to feed and clothe the captive tribes of Covelo. Henley reportedly used these federal funds for his own use to buy up grazing land in George White's Eden Valley. He was eventually removed from this federally appointed office but was never prosecuted for his corruption.

Among their many dastardly deeds, Frank and Pierce Asbill were said by Beard and Carranco to have been the first whites to lay eyes on Round Valley and Eden Valley. The first time they entered this area; they reportedly shot and killed at least thirty natives. These ruthless brothers insisted on using Covelo as a cattle depot to the detriment of the last surviving members of the various Northern California tribes living there. The Indians encamped at Covelo were supposedly put there for their own protection. This mixed tribal group consisted mostly of women, children and the elderly, including members of the Pomo, Wailaki, Yuki, Cahto, Lassik, Maidu, Yana, Wintun, Little Lake, Pit River and the Nomelaki tribes. Previous to the coming of the white eyes this valley was the Nome tribal homeland for many generations. As the English name for this particular band of the Pomo Nation implies, they were reportedly a very short and mischievous people, much as the Gnomes of European lore.

In 1870, Covelo was officially set aside as the reservation for this multitude of Northern California's tribes by Congressional Edict. Alas, it was too little and too late. The settlers of the area had vehemently ignored native rights for many years, and few survived this ordeal. The Springer brothers arrived on the scene when the ominous clouds from this terribly oppressive era at Covelo had begun to clear. By then, only three percent of the region's native population had survived the onslaught of the Spanish occupation and the era of land hungry American miners, ranchers and farmers. However, settlers continued to harass the remaining Indians of the Covelo Reservation. They wanted all Indians gone from Round Valley.

## GIDEON THOMPSON

In 1870, while the Springer brothers were all living in Mendocino County, a brave fellow named Hiram “Gideon” Thompson and a few of his neighboring Texas ranchers gathered a herd of three thousand longhorn cattle with the intent of driving them from Texas all the way to Covelo, California. A tribute to this great Lone Star State pioneer family is in order before we continue on with the Springer brother’s story.



Gideon Thompson originally hailed from Hawkins County, Tennessee. In 1852, he became one of the first emigrants to bring his family to the picturesque area of Sabinal Canyon near Utopia, Texas. This area is located in the south-central part of the state near present day Uvalde. Coincidentally, you may recall 1852 is the same year that the Springer-Green clan left Michigan as emigrants to California. Unlike the Springer's who endured terrible floods when they arrived at Sacramento, the Thompson family survived many hardships in Sabinal Canyon at the hands of the fierce, indigenous tribes of the great Apache, Kickapoo and Comanche Tribes. Mexican banditos and white desperados masquerading as Indians also murdered and pillaged the settlers of this picturesque area for almost three decades. Ranchers often dealt in gold and silver as payment for their cattle, so they were prime targets of the desperate and unscrupulous. Many of the brave, early pioneers of this area suffered tragic losses of family members, personal property and livestock to these various marauding factions. In fact, part of Gideon Thompson's recorded fame during this dangerous era is derived from his reputation as an “Indian Fighter.” He had a few narrow escapes in various confrontations, including a bullet hole through his hat. Somehow, he survived it all. In the early 1880's, the U.S. Army Cavalry finally put a stop to all the insanity. Most of the Indians were killed, run out of the area, or rounded up and put on reservations. Many Anglo and Mexican desperados were hung or jailed. Relatively peaceful times came to the Lone Star Republic.

The incredible Thompson cattle drive of 1870 from Uvalde to Covelo took Gideon and a brave group of his neighboring ranchers over a year to complete. At this time, Texas was a poor and struggling state. The only commodities these early pioneers were truly rich in were courage and cattle. Texas ranchers made a good living during the Civil War selling longhorns to the U.S. Army to make saddle leather, tack and tallow, but that had been five years ago. By 1870, cattle selling for a dollar a head in Texas offered enterprising ranchers six or seven dollars a head *in gold*, out in the booming state of California. No wonder Gideon took such a great risk. This particular cattle drive is rather famous and is celebrated among the annals of western history in books such as: *Pioneers of the Southwest* by Florence Fenley and the *Bandera County History* book by Robert Banta.

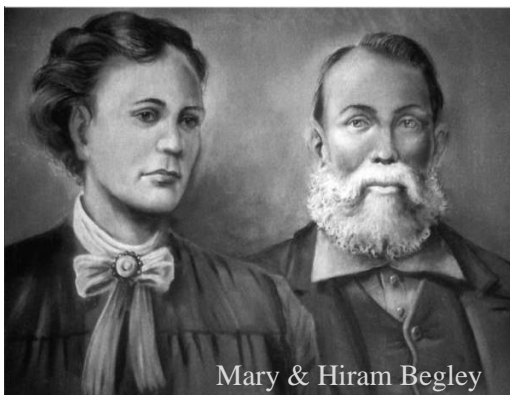
Accordingly, the Thompson party made the crossing to California with much adventure. These brave Texans finally arrived at Covelo in the fall of 1871 and began to sell off their herd. Thompson spent the winter of 1871-'72 at Mendocino's Round Valley. After selling off the remainder of his cattle the following spring, in all likelihood with the help of the Springer brothers, Gideon and company returned to Texas. They left California by train, then a riverboat to St. Louis, a ship to Galveston and finally by horseback, these tired Texans returned home in the fall of 1872, with pockets full of gold.

Gideon Thompson and his wife Margarette Millie O'Bryant had ten children as a result of their union. Gideon lived on to the ripe old age of 85. He died in 1908 and is buried at the Waresville Cemetery in Uvalde, Texas beside his beloved Margarette. May they rest in peace. This pioneer couple truly played a grande part in the Lone Star State Wild West Era and the days before barbed wire ruined the long cattle drives. As you will see, the Thompson clan became a huge influence on the life of Van Rensselaer Springer.

## THE COVELO/EDEN VALLEY MARRIAGES

In December of 1871, George Davidson Springer married the young and beautiful Lucinda Begley at Covelo. George, fresh from making good money working on the Transcontinental Railroad, would have had good reason to celebrate. Chances are that Gideon Thompson may have attended this wedding ceremony. Lucinda was the daughter of Kentucky pioneer Hiram Begley and Mary Norris. Mary was part of an old colonial Virginia family. The newly wed George and Lucinda didn't stay at Covelo for long.

In 1873, their first child; George Ephraim Springer was born at Hangtown (Placerville). Later on, they returned to Covelo, as we know their second child, Olive Rose Anna Victoria was born there in 1877. We speculate that George and Lucinda may have returned to Covelo from Hangtown to keep an eye on the Springer brother's cattle interests. Were the Begley's of Eden Valley in partnership with the Springer's? Did George return to Covelo in anticipation of his brother Van's return from Texas with another Thompson herd? We estimate Van left sometime in 1875 for the Thompson Ranch. If Van planned to return from Texas with a herd, George's reappearance in Eden Valley would match up to this time frame. It all fits rather well.



It is important to note of the Begley family at this point. The father of Lucinda Begley-Springer leads to other Springer-Green and Boone-Swift connections. Hiram Begley was Lucinda's father. He was born in Kentucky in 1824. Close in age to Granville Swift, Hiram named his first son Granville. A tribute to the Kentucky Swifts? Perhaps they were neighbors back in Kentucky or frontier exploring brethren. Hiram's son, Granville Henry Begley was born in 1856 at Georgetown of El Dorado County during the time the Springer brother's uncle William Green is known to be living there. The Springer brothers visited Georgetown during this era. Did the Springer boys first meet the Begley's at Georgetown? On into modern times, the Begley's still maintain a

presence in the Mendocino County. One of this clan's claims to fame is the beloved actor; the late Ed Begley Sr. Ed Begley Jr. has made his mark as an American actor. Another descendant is the acclaimed artist John Begley. Read this author's pioneer profile entitled: "Reflections on Being a Burke" for info on this interesting American colonial family. Records in the Begley file of the Held-Poage repository in Ukiah indicate the Begley's moved from El Dorado to Covelo in 1861 and later to a homestead in nearby Eden Valley. How did Hiram deal with the infamous George White and his murderous cohorts? Why were the Begley's allowed to homestead there when others were being murdered and/or run out of the valley by White? At Eden Valley, the Begley's acquired a homestead of one hundred and sixty acres. Hiram's third and son, Hiram "Top" Begley Jr. was born there in 1872.



Although we have no concrete information regarding the relationships involving the Begley-Springer-Green & Swift Clans, it seems there were some ties among them before the marriage of George Davidson Springer to Lucinda Begley at Covelo. Perhaps the Swift, Springer and Begley kin were partners in the sale of the Thompson cattle? Eden Valley & Round Valley were perfect spots for a large herd until they could be sold off and dispersed. Was George White involved? We may never know what the story is regarding the relationship these pioneers cultivated, or if a deal was struck between any or all these men regarding the Thompson herd. There is a strong likelihood some type of working relationship occurred between these men during the Springer Eden Valley Era.

By the time the Thompson Party returned to Texas, Van Rensselaer Springer started a family at Covelo due to his marriage to Eliza Ann Worgh-Hoyt. He was thirty-four years old. A Mendocino County marriage certificate shows they married in January of 1873. Afterwards, Van had plans to bring in another herd of Thompson's Texas Longhorns to Covelo. This business deal would definitely start his fledgling family off on the right track. Before Van could make the journey to Texas, his wife Eliza became pregnant with their baby girl Grace. In 1874, little Grace died, oh so young. This tragedy hit Van like a ton of Sacramento bricks. Growing up, he witnessed his mother lose several babies. He was the only surviving child born in the decade of the 1830's when the Springer's lived in Galena, Illinois. This is known by Harrison family tradition. Then again, his young sister Ruby had died at Niles, Michigan in 1850 when Van was just eleven. His sister Phebe died at Sacramento in 1853 and his father passed on the following year. The Springer kids were all of a tender age when these family deaths occurred. Van Springer would later experience the untimely deaths of several other beloved family members as well. His sister Sarah died at Sacramento in 1863. His youngest sister Rosanna died at Knoxville in 1870 after a brief marriage to the Cornish miner Caleb Ives. His favorite uncle, William B. Green, would die at Lower Lake in 1873. The year of 1874 would really hit Van hard. Not only would he lose his own baby girl, his beloved mother Loisanna would pass on too. The following year, Van would also lose Granville Swift. Surely, Granville was one of his good friends and possibly an investor in his cattle operations. This long chain of tragic events surely weighed heavily on Van's soul. It would take him a year or so after the culmination of this long run of personal tragedies to regroup and execute his plans to bring another herd in from Texas.

It stirs the imagination to wonder what it would have been like to witness an open air, fireside meeting involving giants of western frontier history such as Gideon Thompson, Ephraim Harrison, Hiram Begley, Granville Swift and his cousin Franklin Sears. Even John Bidwell and Sutter himself may have shown up for a gathering of this magnitude. The Springer brothers would take stories away from such an evening that would last a lifetime. Envisioning a meeting like this would be easy to imagine and hard to resist. Tall tales were surely told if and when any of these seasoned frontiersmen met at Covelo and/or Knoxville. To be part of a fireside meeting among men of such caliber would have been truly fascinating. We have no direct evidence that speaks of such a gathering, but the likelihood is so irresistible. George Springer's wedding to Lucinda Begley quite possibly could have warranted such an occasion. The arrival of the Thompson herd may have warranted it too.

One particular family story claimed by both the Harrison's of Michigan and Thompson's of Texas alludes to such a meeting. An almost identical story printed in two separate biographical books written about these distinguished frontier families goes: "While crossing the plains, a red headed man was skinned alive by Indians. Apparently, this foolish man had sworn to kill the first "redskin" he saw on the plains. He did just that by taking a long shot at a native seen sitting by a creek. A nursing mother was the victim of this careless and barbaric act. A large number of incensed braves from the nearby village soon descended upon the circled wagons and demanded they produce the culprit or else all were threatened with death. The red headed man was given up to the vengeful natives. His agonizing screams of pain as he was staked out and skinned alive nearby the wagon train was forever etched in the minds of these mortified pioneers. Literary claims of being witness to this gruesome event, as well as the family tradition of both clans, could be a clue these great men did meet in California and exchange experiences of their respective travels. The Harrison version of this story is the earlier account.

## VAN SPRINGER MOVES TO TEXAS

By the summer of 1875, it seems Van Rensselaer Springer had partially regrouped from the tragic loss of his Uncle Bill, his own mother and an infant daughter. We feel fairly certain he then proceeded on to Texas with the intent to purchase another Thompson herd and drive them back to Covelo. Unfortunately, due to his delay of over two years, the cattle situation had changed dramatically by the time he finally arrived at Gideon's ranch. The longhorn cattle breed was not getting top dollar in California anymore. The well-established cattle trails from Texas to California were being choked off by hordes of homesteading ranchers and that damned invention, mass produced barbed wire. "Free grazers" passing through on the old cattle trails all over the west were met with prejudice, violence and rustling. Anyway, the more popular breeds of Angus and Hereford were coming to California from the Eastern states by way of the unstoppable Iron Horse.

Van must have seen the writing on the out-house wall once he arrived in Uvalde. He realized the end of the great cattle drives from Texas to the far west was at hand. The eldest Springer brother was surely devastated once again. In all likelihood, Van intended to return to California to sell these cattle off with his brother George and cousin Noble Green, but it was not meant to be. Thus, his childhood dream of crossing the plains with a great herd was dashed in the dust of Texas. Another unsolved mystery is how Van and his cousin Noble Thomas Green traveled to Uvalde. Perhaps by train. Surely, it was quite an eye-opening journey for both of them.

When Van Springer set off for Texas, keep in mind that his wife Eliza stayed on at Covelo and awaited his return home. For almost two years, Eliza Springer pined away for her beloved husband. She held out hope until she somehow learned of his plans to stay in Texas. In the aftermath of this terribly shocking news, it appears that Eliza and/or her family ceremoniously buried Van at Covelo in the Foster Pioneer Cemetery beside their deceased child Grace. There is a record of his burial there and a headstone to boot! This unusual act was completed in 1878, just two months after Eliza's estranged husband said: "I do" to his new bride in Texas. Van was actually very much alive and well, but divorce was such a scandalous event in the Victorian Era. Possibly, Eliza Hoyt-Springer wished to appear to be a widow rather than a divorcee'. There is also a chance that members of the Springer family had "buried" Van to cover his tracks, save face, or simply to spare Eliza's feelings. This is a tantalizing mystery and we have nothing on Eliza after her separation from Van.

In the meantime, Van Springer had obviously fallen in love with Texas and Francis Thompson-Koenigheim. Francis was the widowed daughter of Gideon Thompson. Van's cousin, Noble Thomas Green, accompanied him to Texas. Marriage records show Noble fell in love with and married a Thompson girl too, the young Lily Thompson. Cousin Noble would take Lily to California to marry her in 1878. He stayed long enough to show off his bride to the family and then returned to Texas. Gideon and Margarette Thompson were surely in attendance. Trains from Texas to California were fairly commonplace by then.

All eight of the children from this Green-Thompson marriage but Perry were born in Texas. Their names are Ida Alice, Ira Gideon, Harvey Henry, Walter Thomas, Perry William, William Charles, Gertrude Aileen and George Earl Green. Perry would be born back in Sonoma during a visit there. It appears that at some point later on, members of this particular branch of the Green family left Texas and moved back to live in Sonoma County. Descendants of the Noble Green/Lily Thompson marriage are living in California today. Others reside in Texas.

Van was pushing forty when he married a second time. The saddle was not getting any softer, especially on those long cattle drives. The Thompson ranch was so huge, even by Texas standards, that it was measured in miles instead of acres. Gideon gave 5,000 acres of grazing land to each of his ten children when they married. This generous dowry gave Van Springer the freedom to roam, as a pioneer cowboy would absolutely require. The fruitful Springer-Thompson marriage of 1878 would go on to produce five healthy children. Van and Francis would name them: George, the twins Annabelle and Isabelle, Henrietta and Olive. Tragically, in 1888, the sixth and last child of this marriage died along with mother Francis. Alas, pregnancy and childbirth took many good women in those days. The death of his second wife and another infant combined to be the last straw in a long chain of family losses that finally broke Van Rensselaer Springer's spirit. Both Francis and baby Nels are buried in the Thompson family plot at the Waresville Cemetery in Uvalde. May they rest in peace.

Van would never be the same due to the sudden death of his beloved wife Francis. Thereafter, it is said by Brown family tradition that he became despondent, or as depression was known back then, "melancholia" set in. The surviving Springer children were thereafter raised to adulthood by Gideon Thompson's family. The Brown family, by the way, is one of the early Sabinal Canyon pioneer clans that Van's twin daughters Annabelle and Isabelle Thompson-Springer married into. Van spent the rest of his life the only way he could. He wandered about riding the range, punching cattle, hanging out in the local saloons and playing his fiddle. According to the Brown family, Van periodically stayed with his twin daughters after they married but was never really able to settle down again.

Van Rensselaer Springer continued on as best he could and later died in his late sixties or early seventies at a genuine Texas barn dance on John Brown's farm in south Bexar County. Brown family descendants estimate that he died sometime between 1906 and 1912, making him up to seventy-three when he passed on. In any event, Van was officially buried twice. Once in California and once in Texas. As of yet, although we still have no concrete proof of exactly how old Van was when he died, Brown family tradition states there is no doubt he had fiddled and dosey-doed himself to death during a hoedown at the Brown ranch. Vans' demise was a fitting end to the restless, nomadic, frontier life of a true fiddle toting pioneer cowboy. This enigmatic western figure is buried in the Brown plot located in the Oakley Cemetery of South Bexar County. May Van, Francis and their offspring rest in peace and their descendants prosper. Van Rensselaer Springer's gravesite is right behind Ira, the elder statesman of the Brown clan. No headstone for him currently exists. Van Rensselaer Springer eludes us yet, even in death.

## NELSON LEROY SPRINGER AT KNOXVILLE AND BEYOND

Nels Springer, the youngest of the Springer brothers, is another story. We are not sure if he was willing or able to ride herd with his older brothers at Covelo between 1870-'72. Nels is enumerated in the 1870 Ukiah Township Census as a "Houseman" otherwise known as a bartender/hotel clerk. He did not start a family in Mendocino County as his two older brothers had. He probably returned to the Lower Lake/Knoxville area from Willits when his mother Loisanna died in 1874. As previously mentioned, there is a record of him buying sundries and lumber at the Reddington Mine company store in 1876 as well as selling large amounts of cordwood to the local mines.



From 1874 to 1876, when Nels lived around Knoxville Township, he fell in love with Anna Jane More-Mallally and left the area for a while. They definitely spent time in Sacramento. The obituary of Nelson Leroy's daughter Laura Belle states she was born at Sacramento in 1877. Did he also spend some time at Hangtown when brother George and Lucinda were known to be living there? In any event, the 1880 Napa County Census shows Nels and Anna were back in the Knoxville area living near Zem-Zem, close to Anna's parents. In January of '77, he married this pretty Knoxville gal. Anna Jane was originally a Canadian native of Irish descent. She had borne four children at

Knoxville from her first marriage to a local miner named John Mallally. Mr. Mallally was one of the first to work the Red Elephant quicksilver mine along with well-known Lower Lake pioneer L.B. Tremper. Anna Jane apparently left her husband John for her beloved Nelson Leroy Springer.

The 1880 Knoxville Census shows the Mallally kids were Maggie, Henry, Ida and Mary. These children were living with Nelson Leroy and Anna Jane at the time. From the same census, we know that Nels, at thirty years of age, had fathered a child named Laura Belle. "Belle" is listed as being three years old in the census. An infant baby boy named George Walter is listed as one year old. Another boy, Nelson Leroy Jr. would be born this year, after the census was taken. Nels was working at the Zem-Zem Hotel at this time, bartending at the Owen family hotel. The census has him living adjacent to the Owen clan, again listed as a "houseman."

The decade of 1880 marks the end of an era. The four surviving wagon train children of George Washington Springer and Loisanna Green went their separate ways. The boy's mother and father had both passed on. Uncle William Green had also died. Their sisters Phebe, Sarah, and Rosanna passed on long before their time and Sister Louisa's fate is still in question. George D. Springer would soon head out for new adventures. Van Springer had already moved on to the Lone Star State. As we will soon see, Nels and George were still *Bound to See the Elephant*. Of the surviving Springer children, only Isabel Springer-Harrison continued living in the Napa-Lake County area. In addition, both Green and Harrison descendants still reside in Lake County today.

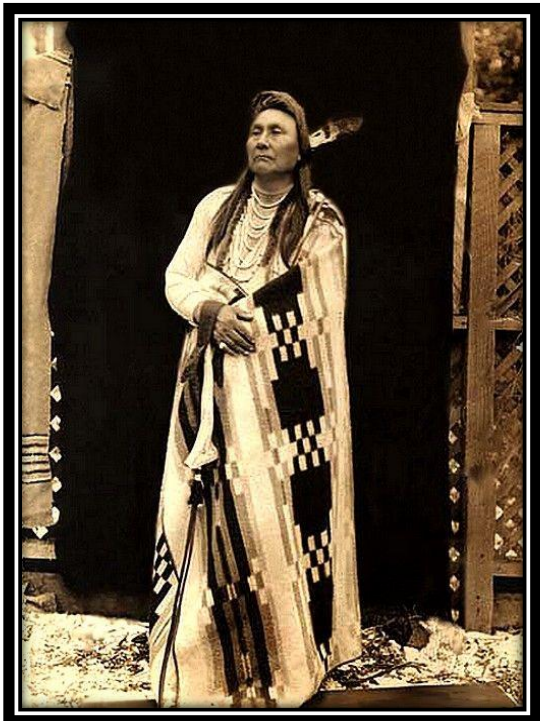
The only exception to the final split of this close-knit pioneer clan would be George and Nels. In a few years, they would reunite. Alas, these two brothers would forever leave behind their lives in California, their greatly admired brother-in-law Ephraim, their beloved sister Isabel, their Green family cousins and sister Louisa Ingram.

## GEORGE DAVIDSON SPRINGER'S IDAHO YEARS

For some reason, George Davidson Springer decided to move his family to the great northwest. The news of the rich gold and galena deposits, plus the stories of vast fertile plains surely beckoned to him. There may also be a connection with two of Stephen Hite's sons that had moved to Idaho. It might seem a bit strange at first glance that George and his wife Lucinda Begley would uproot and move on again, lest we forget the restless spirit that dwells in this pioneer generation of the Green/Springer clan.

In 1881, George Davidson Springer departed California bound for the last vestige of the American frontier known as the Idaho Territory. He traveled there, according to family tradition "in a heavily loaded prairie schooner towed by a team of six mules." Who could possibly harness, let alone handle a team of six ornery and skittish mules except a disciple of Ephraim Harrison? On board this covered wagon were George's pregnant wife Lucinda and their two young children: George Ephraim and Olive Rose Anna Victoria Springer. What an adventure this trip must have been. Angry factions of the surviving native tribes were still roaming the territory, taking revenge on pioneers in reprisal for the destruction of their homeland and their ancient way of life. George apparently took this danger in stride. We have no information that might point to the trail they took or if other pioneers joined the Springer's on this journey, but in fact, this migration thus created a second generation of Springer wagon train children. George and Lucinda Springer's son George Ephraim would have been about eight years old at this time. Coincidentally, this was the same age his father was when he had crossed the plains in 1852. Lucinda was obviously a woman cut from the hand-woven cloth of the pioneers. Not long after the family reached Idaho, she gave birth to another girl child who was named after her. Three more children would follow. Charlotta Melissa, Charles Leroy and Dicey Springer were all born in the Idaho Territory. It was a fruitful marriage.

George Davidson Springer arrived in the gold rich Grangeville area about the time that most of the placer mining had all but panned out. The large destructive company run hydraulic mining operations were in vogue. George could supply these miners with wheat, corn, cattle, produce and other essentials. He could also mine for gold in his spare time. Granville Swift most likely gave that fever to him. Mining was undoubtedly one of his greatest passions. If nothing else, George could work as a teamster for the mines. All of these skills combined should have provided for his family well, as long as the crops of wheat and corn that George planted came to fruition. The family settled in what would come to be known as the Cottonwood-Grangeville area of Idaho County. This pristine plateau, located on the Camas Prairie at the base of the Bitter Root Mountain chain, became the latest Springer homestead. George and family arrived there about three years after the Nez Perce Nation was forced out of the area. Huge gold and Galena discoveries, larger than the rush of the Klondike and California combined brought in a flood of prospectors over the course of two decades, totally disrupting the Nez Perce way of life.



The Nez Perce Exodus began when Chief Joseph, the famous Nez orator and spiritual leader, along with his warrior counterpart Chief Looking Glass, gathered the remnants of the Idaho, Washington and Oregon bands of this respected tribe in an effort to leave their homeland behind. This sojourn was their answer to reservation life. They preferred to join Sitting Bull in Canada, to live in the traditional way and dance the Ghost Dance until the white eyes destroyed themselves. In 1877, as this contingent of the proud Nez Perce Nation left their homeland behind, they were literally hounded by the U.S. Army. It was a rancorous rout that went on for 1800 miles up to Canada's border, with many skirmishes along the way between the U.S. Army Cavalry and the Nez Perce warriors. Seven hundred men, women and children, always moving for one hundred and five days, were finally captured by the Army fifty miles from the Canadian Border. General William Tecumseh Sherman called the Nez Perce "the finest battle tacticians and horseman he had ever seen." This was a huge compliment from a battle hardened and tenacious general who fought against the best the Confederacy had to offer as well as some of the fiercest tribes across the U.S. The battle tactics used by the Nez Perce during this trek are still studied at West Point today.

The eloquent Chief Joseph was one of the few Nez Perce leaders to survive this extended battle with the United States Army Cavalry. Due in part to his outspoken and influential words, Joseph was never allowed to return to his homeland by the United States government. After their capture, the surviving four hundred and fifty, including Joseph, were sent to Fort Leavenworth and then on to the Salt Fork Cherokee Reservation. In 1885, the surviving members of this proud but much persecuted Nez Perce contingent were allowed to return to what was left of their homeland, the Lawpai reservation nearby Grangeville, Idaho. They returned without their beloved Joseph.

The Springer brothers lived near the newly formed reservations of the Indian people on at least three occasions during their lifetimes. In all likelihood, this gave them a unique understanding of tribal ways. Undoubtedly, they were witness to three separate attempts by the United States government to isolate, domesticate, educate and/or eradicate tribal people by way of reservations, although the boys may not have seen it that way. The Springer brothers first lived quite near the Round Valley Reservation of Covelo, California, then the Nez Perce-Lawpai Reservation of Grangeville, Idaho and later the Umatilla Reservation of Baker, Oregon. Van would not witness the Lawpai Reservation in Oregon but would have been exposed to reservation life on occasion in Texas. Many generations later, on into present times, a descendant of the Springer-Harrison clan of Idaho became tied to the Nez Perce through a marriage into the bloodline of the great warrior & leader, Chief Looking Glass.

## BOUND TO SEE THE ELEPHANT ONCE AGAIN

Nelson Leroy Springer continued living at Knoxville instead of moving on with his brother George to seek new opportunities in the Idaho Territory, at least for a while. The separation of these two brothers was due in part to the fact Nels and Anna Jane had three young offspring to consider at the time of brother George's departure. Anna Jane's parents were well established in the area, surely another factor in their decision to stay put. It was not until after Anna Jane More-Mallally-Springer died that Nels reconnected with his older brother in Idaho. Nelson's beloved Anna Jane tragically died at Knoxville in 1884. She and her infant baby boy are buried in the More plot in the Spanish Flats Cemetery of Napa County. May they rest in peace.

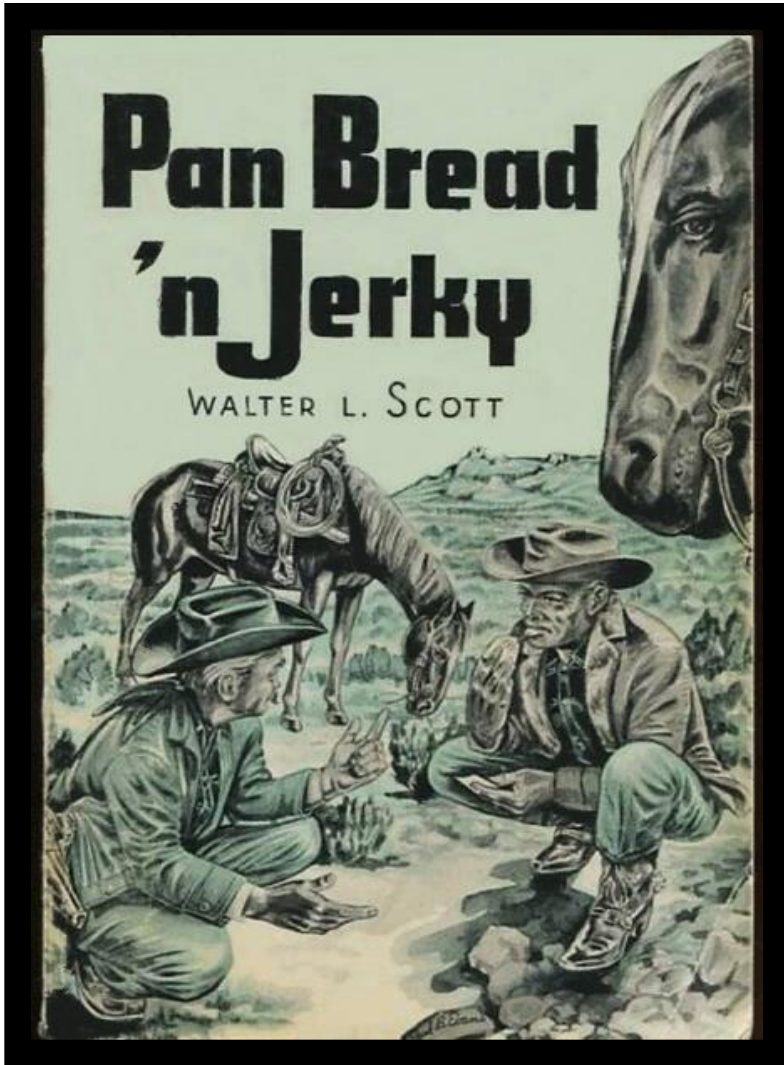
The grieving Nelson Leroy Sr. then had three kids of his own to raise by himself as well as four stepchildren. Nels must have given up the responsibility of raising his stepchildren at some point before he left for Idaho. No official reference is known to exist, nor any family tradition or personal letters that talk of the Mallally clan after Nelson left California. Perhaps the More family raised the kids or John Mallally reclaimed his children after the death of his ex-wife. In any event, the split of this large family must have been hard on all involved.

In the summer of 1885, the young widower Nelson Leroy Springer and his three children followed brother George to the great Northwest. We wonder if he witnessed the return of the beleaguered Nez Perce to the reservation at Grangeville once they arrived. Nels wrote a letter on October 16 of 1885 to his beloved sister Isabel regarding the journey to Grangeville. He states they first traveled to San Francisco. We surmise they traveled from Napa County's Zem-Zem through Pope Valley by stagecoach to St. Helena and then continued on by train. Nels writes they laid over in "The City" (San Francisco) for a few days to await a ship. By an unknown ship they traveled to Portland on "calm seas...arriving there on the 10th". From Portland, they continued on to Lewiston, Idaho but we don't know how they completed this leg of the trek to Grangeville. Nels states in the letter that he had to "let his watch go" at this point in order to complete the trip.

Nelson Leroy's oldest daughter Laura Belle would have been about eight, George Walter five and Nelson Leroy Springer Jr. was about four years of age at this time. As fate would have it, these two well-traveled Springer boys were near in age to their father when he crossed the plains three decades ago. As had their father, these kids would also experience cruising on the Pacific Ocean by steamship. The faded old letter written by Nels to his sister Isabel tells of locating his big brother George near Grangeville. Two other letters written by Nelson Leroy to Isabel show these brothers and their families continued on in the Grangeville area for a couple more years. In 1888, the Springer brothers with their families in tow would again pick up and move on, this time to Oregon. These wagon train brothers were obviously still *Bound to See the Elephant*. They would again move on to a new territory, traveling by way of the faithful prairie schooner once again. This time, they would migrate south to the Baker City area of Oregon, adjacent to the Umatilla Indian Reservation and more gold finds.

We have a priceless story of the journey from Idaho to Oregon. Charlott Morris, the granddaughter of Charlotta Springer, tells a story of an incident involving her grandmother: While on route from Idaho to Oregon, the Springer's stopped to rest. When they moved on, poor little Charlotta had dozed off under a tree and was inadvertently left behind. When this five-year-old girl awoke, she realized what happened. Charlotta was "crying her eyes out" when an Indian brave found her. Little Charlotta goes on to say that she was terrified of the man who was mounted on a horse. He dismounted and approached her saying, "me no hurt you." She recognized the fellow. He worked for her father on the Springer's Idaho ranch. He put her on his horse and tracked the Springer party until he caught up with them, returning Charlotta to a surprised and grateful family. Charlotta's mother Lucinda fed the hungry Umatilla natives who came to her doorstep in Oregon. She never turned them away.

## THE OREGON YEARS



We would know little of what George and Nelson Springer did while living out the rest of their lives near Baker City, Oregon except for a book published in 1960 entitled: *Pan Bread 'N Jerky*. This marvelous little book, written by Walter L. Scott, gives us many great insights into his own life story as well as the Springers. He was a neighbor and close friend of the Springer brothers in Oregon. From the tone of this autobiographical sketch, it is obvious that Scott had great respect for these brothers. What tall tales of California's most prominent pioneers did the Springer brothers tell this man? These boys carried stories of frontier adventures told to them firsthand by Ephraim Harrison, Gideon Thompson and Granville Swift among so many other early California pioneers. What a fascinating pair they surely were to Mr. Scott.

The Springer descendants of Oregon tell us Mr. Scott had known Nels and George since he was just a child. Springer references in the Scott autobiography speak of tragedy, comedy, pranks, and their mutual passion for hunting and camping out in the wild. It is a tribute that we are very thankful to have. Although the events described in the text of this book do not give specific dates, Oregon descendants are certain this work speaks of Walter's life until 1907.

The first story from *Pan Bread 'N Jerky* that talks about the Springer brothers is one of tragedy and Christian charity. Mr. Scott tells us that Nels acquired a homestead on some land by Denny Creek outside of Baker City, Oregon. With the help of his brother George, Nels built a fine two-story log cabin there. Both families lived there for a year or so and then George built his own home about a mile away. Mr. Scott goes on to say his family homestead was also located nearby. One morning, Walter observed Nels Springer's kids coming up to his house on the path between their respective homesteads. He observed that "they were all barefooted." The kids told Scott their cabin had burned down during the night. The eldest child Laura Belle was very upset. She had cleaned out the fireplace and inadvertently dumped the embers into the wood box adjoining the house. Walter mentions that "Belle" was about sixteen at this time. That would place this event in or around 1893. Scott goes on to say he discovered Nelson Leroy Sr. had badly burned his hands trying to save their belongings from the fire. He carried Nels directly to the nearby town of Baker City for medical treatment. When the community heard of this misfortune, they donated essentials so the Springer family could get by until a new home was built. Ahh... good old-fashioned Christian charity.



The next two stories from the Walter Scott autobiography describe a prank and a bit of comedy. The first reminds us of the family tradition that speaks to the boy's father, George Washington Springer and his known penchant for playing practical jokes. No doubt, Nelson and George inherited this comical habit from their late father. Mr. Scott first describes one of many hunting trips he went on with the Springer brothers. They brought along some fresh beef this particular time and were roasting it on sticks by the evening campfire. That rascal Nels sprinkled sugar instead of salt on Walter's skewer when he was not looking. This tomfoolery made the meat impossible to cook as it kept curling up! The boys must have gotten a quiet snicker or two out of that shenanigan as it transpired.

Another Scott story goes that while on another hunting excursion, George Springer left his rifle propped up against a big Fir tree near the campfire. Apparently, the warmth of the fire caused this pine tree to drop a big glob of sap directly into the barrel of that rifle. The following day, George shot at a deer and the plugged gun barrel literally exploded in his face! Although it did not harm him, according to Mr. Scott it nearly scared the poor guy to death! Lucky man, that George Davidson Springer. They must have gotten a good laugh from this for years on end. Scott also describes how meticulous Nels was in preparing the provisions for their many hunting and camping adventures. He would lay out all the necessities in an orderly fashion and then pack it all up so as not to forget anything. Scott's description of Nelson measuring and mixing the ingredients for pan bread reminds us of the days on the plains when their mother Loisanna made this popular pioneer staple. The smell of the fireside bread must have subconsciously reminded the boys of their departed mother and the journey to California when they cooked it in the wild. Scott describes how to make this bread by dribbling water in the flour sack filled with the prepared ingredients until it was workable. Then, they would place the prepared dough in a long-handled skillet propped up sideways against the fire. Pioneer pan bread... it must have filled the air with that delicious aroma for miles.

Walter Scott describes another time they were camping and cooking pan bread by the fire. A big Umatilla Brave appeared solo, out of nowhere. He was riding a horse bareback with only a piece of rope used as a bridle. The lone brave never uttered a word but pointed to the pan bread and motioned to his mouth. They fed him a couple of scones, but the quiet Umatilla never dismounted his horse. He stayed for a short time just looking around then disappeared into the night. They never laid eyes on him again.

A final story was presented by the Begley-Springer descendants of Oregon. These stories prove out the brothers' passion for mining and show that the Harrison talent of fiddle playing was carried on through to proceeding generations. It is known by descendants of the Oregon Springer clan that a "crystal mine" was located on George Davidson Springer's Denny Creek homestead. Gold is known to be found in association with quartz crystal. We surmise this claim was first and foremost a gold mine that eventually played out or possibly it was never a major producer to begin with. After the turn of the 20th century, quartz was in high demand, especially during W.W. I and W.W. II, perhaps why the family descendants' refer to this old Springer claim as a "crystal mine."

This claim was first worked by George and brother Nelson. Later, the offspring of the Springer brothers would learn the trade of mining here. It is known that Charles Leroy, the son of George Springer worked this mine well into his adult life. Charlie's son Theron Springer made for the third generation to do so. The location of this well worked family mine and the remains of the Springer homestead still exist, although the homestead is no longer in the possession of the family. George Davidson's grandson Theron also promoted the Bonanza gold mine near Halfway, Oregon. This claim is about one hundred miles from the original Oregon Springer homestead.

Obviously, George Springer not only taught his son the skills of mining, Charlie showed an interest in the art of fiddle playing. He was a champion fiddler who competed in the Old Tyme Fiddle Players events. Thus, a second generation of Springer's would carry on the musical teachings of the great Ephraim Harrison. Descendants of the California Springer-Harrison family are also known to have carried on the family tradition of mining. To this day,

five generations later, a few of Ephraim and Isabel's descendants have been involved in working some of the biggest mining operations in the United States and abroad. Blanche Stroop, George Washington Springer and Granville Swift are surely to be proud. Ephraim Harrison would probably just shake his head.

Both of the Springer boys farmed and raised stock until retirement and mined their claim near Baker, Oregon for the rest of their lives. Both men lived to a ripe old age. Oddly though, George and his wife Lucinda divorced in July of 1907, after a thirty-six-year marriage. Divorce papers state Lucinda "cooked for the miners of the area" after they split up. On the other hand, Nelson Leroy was a young man in his early thirties when he lost his beloved Anna Jane, and yet he never remarried.

In closing, we are saddled with the somber task of stating the demise of these two pioneer brothers. Nelson and George Springer witnessed and participated in the "taming of the west" and survived it all well past most of their contemporaries. They had rubbed shoulders with some of the most celebrated men of the times and lived to tell the tales of adventure few could have known about or believed. Nelson Leroy Springer lived to the fairly advanced age of seventy-seven. He passed away on March 10, 1925 at his home in Bend, Oregon. George Davidson Springer died at Oak Grove, Oregon on August 29, 1930 at the impressive age of 86 years. May these brave pioneer wagon train brothers rest in peace. Lord knows, they had surely *Seen the Elephant* more times than most.

So ends a lasting tribute to three brothers and five sisters of the California Springer clan. Although not well known in the annals of Western History, this family was an integral part of California's most exciting times. This pioneer family profile is not meant to be the last word in the history of these resilient people, but instead, we hope this saga will inspire future generations to continue to search for answers to the many questions posed herein and will continue to redefine the intricate relationships these pioneer families maintained even further. Hopefully, many of these questions will yet be solved through additional research as the digital age opens more files that have yet to see the light of day. May the Springer, Green, Harrison, Swift and Hite descendants across America be blessed to live long, healthy lives and proudly carry forth these great colonial bloodlines in spirit and deed.

## CREDITS

This glimpse into the true-life exploits of a brave frontier family would not exist without years of work spent compiling a great amount of compelling information. Blanche Stroop and Walter Green Jr. are the true inspiration and main resources for this profile. Several members of "The Springer Family National Forest" also contributed a great deal to this story with additional photos, family stories and genealogical information.

**Ric Green** is credited here for his work on the Green family.

**Carl Brown and his wife Jo Nell** added priceless information on Van Springer's years in Texas and the life of Gideon Thompson.

**Tami Long-Claire** added so much to George and Nelson Springer's days in Oregon. Thanks to Tami for her heads-up regarding Walter Scott's Pan Bread 'N Jerky published by Caxton Press. Tami also discovered the long forgotten burial place of George Washington Springer and his daughter Phebe. She has also dedicated a great website to the Springer line. Bless you Tami.

**Mary Sweet** added a great deal to the Oregon Springer story with a priceless account of little Charlotta, as well as some of the Begley family info.

**Judy Kuebler** gave us the valuable information on Stephen Hite.

**"Scooter" Swift-Clark** is credited for his invaluable insight into the Swift family.

**Diane Reichwein** confirmed and added facts to the Springer line.

**Dean Enderlin** - Mining historian and Geologist is also praised here for his research pertaining to Knoxville and some of the miscellaneous mining information. Dean also dug up several interesting facts on the Springer-Green-Harrison's days at Lower Lake and Knoxville. He also led the way to the William Baker Green and William Scarf Probate records and confirmed some of the legends on Granville Swift.

**Duane Goforth** is credited for his patience and technical work in dealing with a manuscript written in four different programs over the years and his assistance in locating many of the records pertaining to this story found in the Lower Lake Schoolhouse Museum Collection.

**Anita Crabtree and Kathy Alvey** of the Lake County Genealogical Society are included here for confirmation of family data, probate documents and obits. My gratitude is presented to **Anita Crabtree** for publishing my write up of the Herndon Pioneer Cemetery on her great website: CAGenweb in the Lake County Cemeteries Section.

**Donna Howard** also had a hand in producing some of these important documents.

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**Phil Carnahan and the late June Mcloud** along with the entire volunteer staff of the Mendocino County Historical Society's Held-Poage repository led us to the Begley-Springer and George White info.

Bless you all.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Kevin Engle is a direct line, eleventh generation American of New Jersey-Quaker descent. (Robert Engle -1682). He is a free-lance writer and a fan of Gold Rush Era history. He sat on the board of directors of the Lake County Historical Society for several years and is now chairman of digitization projects for that organization. Since 2004, Kevin has worked to preserve and restore the Herndon Pioneer Cemetery located at Lower Lake, Ca. This historic burial ground is the final resting place of Loisanna Green-Springer-Scarf and her brother William Baker Green.

The Springer Brothers Saga is based on and inspired by the oral history of Blanche Stroop. Copies of The Stroop Oral History and the 1852 Wagon Train Journal of George Washington Springer are available from the permanent collection of the Lower Lake School House Museum located at Lower Lake, California.

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