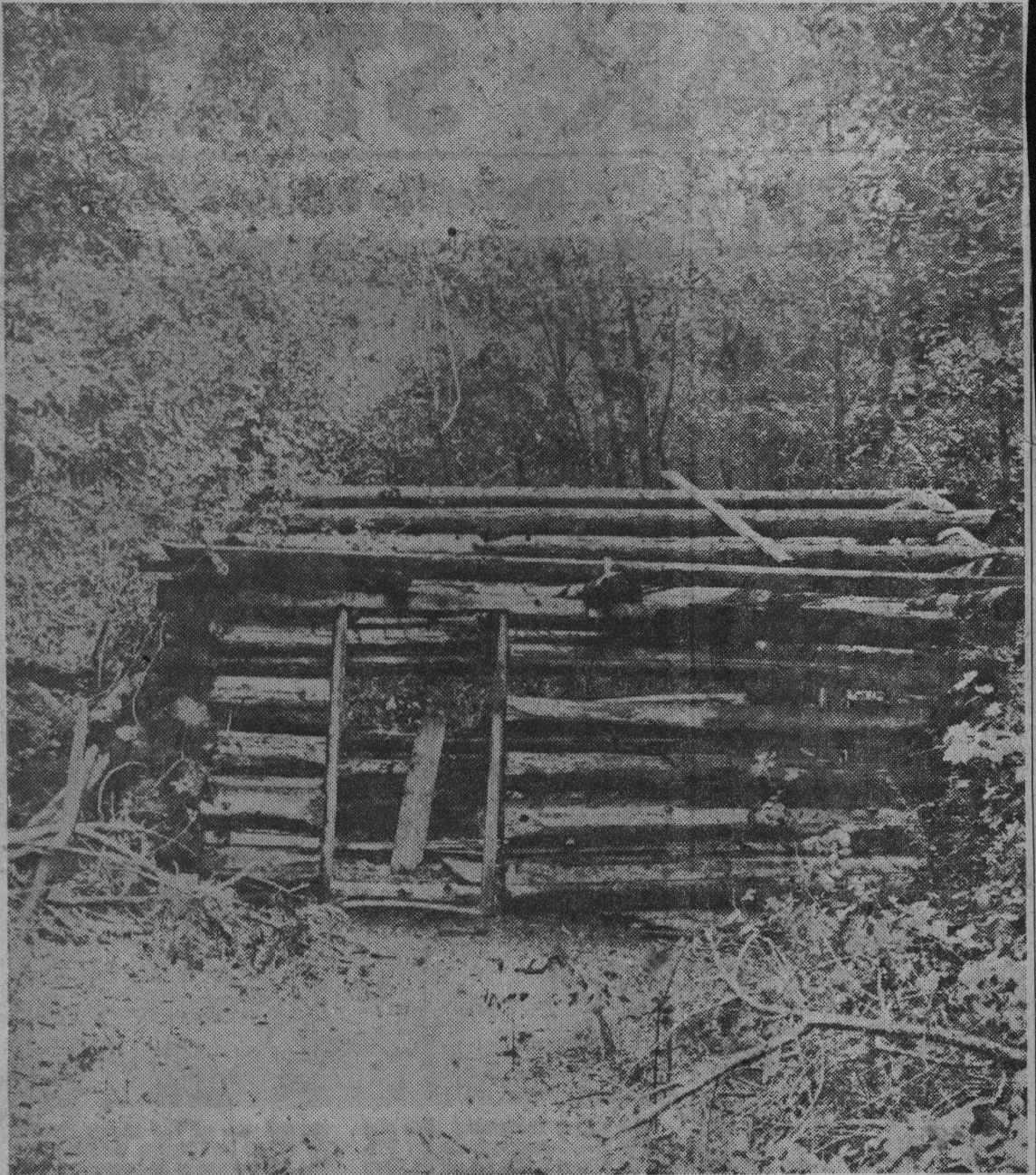


Santa Cruz Yesterdays



"FREMONT" CABIN AT BIG TREES

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

A cabin which was built a century ago near the present Cowell Big Trees was, like everything else in the vicinity, attributed to Gen. John C. Fremont.

Despite his declaration and his autobiography that he spent only one night at Zayante the legend grew that he had erected the old log cabin and lived in it for a time.

In 1890 this part of the Fremont legend was debunked by Otis Ashley, the Felton pioneer, in an interview in the Sentinel:

"Now as regards the renowned and so much talked of log cabin that Fremont built just below the Big Trees.

Built By Ashleys

"That is a mistake as I built that cabin myself. My wife helped me saw out the door and a place for the chimney and helped pack rock to build the chimney.

"We lived in it and we helped build the sawmill on the stream near the Big Trees. The mill went out in the winter of 1849-50 when flood water carried off about 100,000 feet of lumber.

"The big tree that is called the 'Jumbo' is the one that Fremont measured in February, 1846. It measured 275 feet high and 17 feet, 4 inches in diameter. It was called the Fremont tree at that time.

"The hollow tree that is now known as a rendezvous for runaway sailors who came to Isaac Graham for protection."

Otis Ashley, the early debunker of the Fremont legend, had been born in Martinsburg, New York, in 1820. He was newly married at Plainfield, Ill., when the western migration fever struck him and he and his young wife crossed the plains with an ox team in a group which arrived in California just ahead of the ill-fated Donner party.

After participating in the "Battle of Santa Clara" in January of 1847 he enlisted in Fremont's California battalion. Discharged a few months later he arrived at Zayante in the early summer of 1847 to work for Isaac Graham. He and Moses Meder leased Graham's sawmill when the rush to the gold fields took Graham and most of his employees.

Became Felton Pioneer

Except for a few years in San Jose, from 1856 to 1859, Ashley lived near Felton until his death on March 15, 1904. His wife, a native of Ohio, who had crossed the plains with him, had died the previous October.

The rare picture above, taken in the late 70s, reveals that the cabin

had by then deteriorated to little more than a skeleton. Not long afterward that too melted away. Today it would be difficult to determine the exact site.