

Who's Who of Mid-County's Pioneers

by Carolyn Swift

Who were the pioneers of Mid-County? Were they bigger than life? What did they accomplish? Why should we remember them?

Pioneers are generally acknowledged as the vanguards of the American way of life who came here at the birth of statehood. They were homesteaders and squatters, heroes, idealists, adventurers, free-booting opportunists, simple farmers, sojourning gamblers, humble artists and frustrated minorities.

They were people seeking to make life better, although few seemed to care about expense to the prevailing culture.

The Californio, although native born, was descended from an earlier set of pioneers and colonists from Spain and Mexico, ones who foretold annihilation of the native Ohlones. Both were to become victims of the Yankee cultural explosion set off by the Gold Rush of 1848.

Not all pioneers won a foothold on California soil or were recorded among the Golden State's cherished forefathers. The Chinese, for example, were early arrivals who quickly became victims of dis-



Hihn mansion, Santa Cruz.

crimination and were denied pioneer status.

Women aptly represent another population whose contributions have been, for the most part, ignored.

Historians have to be careful when they build up a local settler as venerated "pioneer" simply because of the information that's likely to be available. Those who were success-

ful (in grabbing land, setting up business, gaining social standing or elected to office) were also those in the best financial position to have lengthy biographical sketches written about themselves in the history books. Actual merit falls second to one's ability to look important.

As an isolated community always given to its own par-

ticular quirks of character, Santa Cruz County early on attracted a great pioneer assortment. Most were plain "folks" who lived garden variety lives but nonetheless gave us the legacy of their perspectives of local affairs, and to many of these attitudes we cling with an obstinacy that defies reason.

Ordinary people, the builders of our communities,

do not often appear in historical sketches. They are known to us chiefly because they are listed in deed books, voting records, brief news clips and on death certificates

The "movers and shakers" of early history receive the most attention. They are equally the source of pride and shame when we learn of some of their schemes.

Men such as **Frederick Augustus Hihn** rose to the top of commerce and industry, but did so many times at the expense of the small landowner or the less fortunate homesteader.

Hihn was the founder of Capitola, downtown Santa Cruz, Aptos, Felton, Valencia; the owner of sawmills, lumberyards, apple sheds; the founder of banks and builder of railroads. But never was he a popular man. In all words spoken of him, many carried respect but few had any affection.

Lacking economic or social power as an early settler, another way to gain pioneer status was to have a gimmick.

Charley Parkhurst fits this category. Parkie was a supposedly "tough" one-eyed stage driver who lived some

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John Daubenbiss.

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20 years locally, mostly in the vicinity of Freedom Blvd. and Day Valley Road, Aptos. When

he died in 1879, people discovered he was a she. It was as good a way as any to get yourself remembered.

People told stories of Charley's prowess as a stage

driver and skill as a lumberman; in truth, Parkie was a Valencia woodchopper suffering from rheumatism that deformed "his" small frame. He made just enough to get by, and certainly broke no records, except one. He/she was the first woman registered to vote in California, signing in during the national election of 1868.

It's important to note that nobody knows for sure if Charley actually voted, and if he/she did, the vote was cast as a man and not for the sake of women's rights. Charley was no feminist.

There *were* feminists here, though, two genuine ones who were all any community could wish for (and certainly, Santa Cruz must have made such a wish because today these women have moved from the category of "eccentrics" to a class by themselves.)

Eliza Farnham and **Georgiana Bruce Kirby** met when introduced by Margaret Fuller. They were allied with the Transcendalist community and shared ambitions to be teachers and nurses.

Georgiana and Eliza revolutionized the penitentiary system in New England while working together at the Female State Prison at Sing Sing, N.Y. in the 1840s. Though out-

spoken and talented, the two came west by separate paths and were eventually rejoined in Santa Cruz in 1850.

As writers, they recorded the essence of Santa Cruz County as it struggled to life. They acknowledged the transition between the Californio culture and the Yankee; they judged their contemporaries without mercy, noting the opportunities, and lack thereof, for women, the impoverishment of medical care, and the incidents of racism.

They explored how to become farmers, carpenters, and adventurers (attired in Turkish pants, no less.)

Both married in Santa Cruz in 1852. Eliza, making an unsuccessful choice, gave birth to a child that died and blazed a new trail through the process of divorce.

Georgiana fared better. She and husband **Richard C. Kirby**, a successful tanner, remained in Santa Cruz the rest of their lives and were respected community members. Georgiana was always the activist; in the 1870s she led an attempt to gain local women the right to vote and brought to Santa Cruz heavyweights of the women's rights movements, **Susan B. Anthony** and **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**.

Aside from such spectacu-

lar accomplishments and individual contributions, another way to gain pioneer status in the early days was to have something named after you.

There are so many entries in this category they can only be mentioned in passing.

Generous descriptions, however, can found the *very* complete book, *Santa Cruz County Place Names, A Geographical Dictionary*, by Donald Thomas Clark

Rodriguez Gulch was listed on 1865 maps but is known today as Arana Gulch.

The Rodriguez was **Joe Antonio**, who settled at Villa de Branciforte as a retired soldier in 1798.

Don Rodriguez and **Don Jose Joaquin Castro** represent the culture that developed here during the brief generations of the Californio. Between them, they managed to secure title to the entire mid-section of what is now Santa Cruz County, outwitting a limit of 48,400 acres by collecting modest grants for themselves and much bigger ones for relatives and in-laws. Castro and Rodriguez, true pioneers, amassed almost a quarter million acres on seven ranchos.

Relationships between the two families were woven by marriage. The largest grant, totaling some 34,370 acres, was

awarded to Castro's daughter, Martina, born at Branciforte in 1807.

Capitola's beach was for awhile known as **Lodge's Beach**, because of Martina's marriage to the foreigner **Michael Lodge** in 1833.

Michael would have won himself a prominent spot among pioneers had he not decided in 1849 to try and increase the family account with a sojourn to mining country. The lure to the mines must have been great for Lodge, since Californio wealth was measured not with gold, but cattle, and Michael surely could see the shift coming, he was going to need some dollars.

In gold country, Lodge set up a successful business with a partner. Martina and the kids were there, too, and that was a mistake. The two youngest Lodge children died in an epidemic; the father then sent his wife and remaining children back home to the Rancho Soquel. He was himself murdered on the way home (the family suspected the partner as the murderer.)

Grief-stricken, Martina soon remarried another foreign settler, **Louis Depeaux**, who thankfully did not remain here long enough to leave his name on anything.

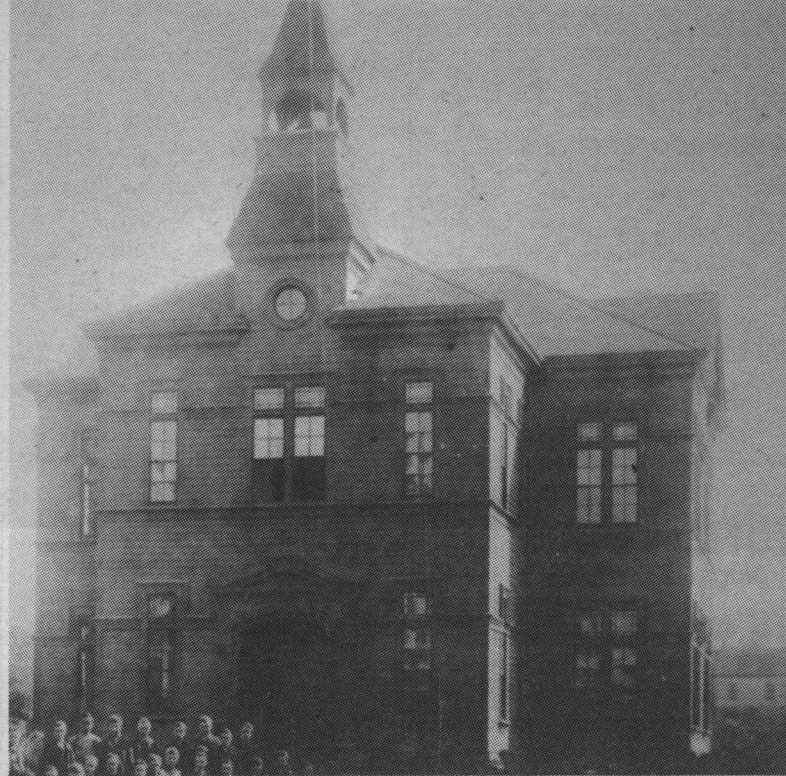
The matriarch divided her lands among herself and her surviving children. Nearly all her daughters were wed to men of the new cultural order: **Nicanor Cota** to **Francois Lajeunesse**; **Luisa Cota** to **Jean Fourcade**; **Carmelita Lodge** to **Thomas Fallon**; **Josefa Lodge** to **Lambert Clements**; **Antonia Lodge** to **Henry W. Peck**; **Helena Lodge** to **Jose D. Littlejohn**; and **Guadalupe Lodge** to **Jose Averon**.

These men were among the "founding fathers" who sprinkled their names here and there about the landscape.

For instance, "Littlejohn Gluch" is the small one next to Pot Belly Beach Road, and "Littlejohn Bridge" connects Old San Jose Road across Soquel Creek, five miles north of Soquel. "Peck Gulch" was listed in Capitola until about 1888, and is today Noble Gulch (after pioneer **Augustus Noble**, buyer of the Lodge homestead.)

Henry Winegar Peck and his brother-in-law, **Lambert Clements**, were among the first justices-of-the-peace for Soquel Township.

Soquel got its start in the days of Lodge, when two ambitious settlers leased land for the first industry. **John Hames** and **John Daubenbiss** had



Soquel School, founded by John Daubenbiss.

worked together first in San Jose about 1845, and then spent time with John C. Fremont's California Battalion. By '47, they were down here running a sawmill and grist mill on the east bank of the Soquel River.

Hames was among the majority of local anglo men who went to the mines in '48. Returning, he tried to collect on a debt with Lodge, but his widow refused to pay.

By '54, John was working with a brother, **Benjamin Hames**, at another grist mill up Corralitos Creek. Ben was a county surveyor a number of years, and gave his name to Hames Road between Freedom Blvd. and Corralitos.

Daubenbiss stayed in Soquel, buying an 1100 acre farm and building a dam. In 1847, he married **Sarah C. Lard** and settled down to raise his family in a handsome home

that remains today as a fine reminder of the stature of Soquel in 1868.

Daubenbiss was a good example of pioneer stamina: he built a school, donated land for the cemetery, served in numerous offices and contributed as much as he could towards what he saw as good for the town.

On the other side of the river, an Ohio farmer and former New Orleans tea-taster took up farming on a hill bought from **Thomas and Carmelita Fallon** in 1850.

Joshua Parrish, another forty-niner, left his name on the property on the east side of the river from the county road (Soquel Drive) north to Bates Creek. The parrish family was instrumental in the founding and construction of the "Little White Church," the Soquel Congregational Church built by ship's carpenter **S.A. Hall** in 1868.

It was next to this church (which has, by the way, the only Parrish parish hall), the Soquel townspeople built a tiny "city hall" to entice the State Legislature to visit here and consider this a site for the State Capitol.

The initial community meeting to discuss this idea was held in **Ned Porter's**

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store. If there is a family name most strongly associated with the character of Soquel, Porter is probably it.

Ned founded the first store. He extended liberal credit (according to the late historian Leon Rowland), and often took either produce or land to settle the bills. In time, Ned owned a good stretch of Porter Street. His buildings provided homes for the first post office, and he was (of course) the first postmaster.

Ned wasn't a lone Porter. His brother Ben and a bunch of cousins were forty-niners intent on making life happen in California.

Benjamin Franklin Porter and cousin **George K. Porter** arrived together in the winter of '50-'51. A few years later they dug a foothold with a tannery purchased for \$600 (the leather was shipped green for the New England shoe industry.)

The tannery was in a gulch that still bears the Porter name, situated about one-and-a-half miles east of Soquel Creek at the easternmost edge of the Soquel Rancho. The tannery had been started by one of the Lodge sons-in-law, Jean Fourcade, who sold it at a bargain.

Joined by another cousin, **Frank Porter**, the family succeeded in tanning and lumbering. The Porter Tannery became the second most important (but best remembered) in the county.

Ben married **Kate Hubbard** and in 1872 built a two-story home overlooking the ocean. He became the found-

ing director of Santa Cruz County Bank of Savings and Loan, and acquired extensive property in Oregon, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Monterey, San Francisco and Santa Cruz.

His daughter, Mary, married San Franciscan **William T. Sesnon**, who in 1911, built a summer mansion on the Porter homestead (today part of Cabrillo College.)

"It is not my intention to be captured."

—Faustino Lorenzana,
Branciforte Bandito

The Sesnons donated land and architectural assistance for the "Soquel Porter Memorial Library" which has flourished (despite the odds) as a tribute to Ben and Kate.

Another cousin, **John T. Porter**, joined his kin in Soquel and later became an important pioneer in Watsonville and Pajaro.

John gained some notoriety as sheriff from 1858-61, but did well enough to be named tax collector for the Port of Monterey until the position was abolished in 1863 (leaving some questions about what Porter did with the money.)

By 1880, John owned "several fine farms," in the Pajaro Valley and had status as a prominent citizen.

One last way to be noticed (although not necessarily recognized as a pioneer) was to do something *bad*.

Actually, only lately has extensive work been accomplished on the early "crimi-

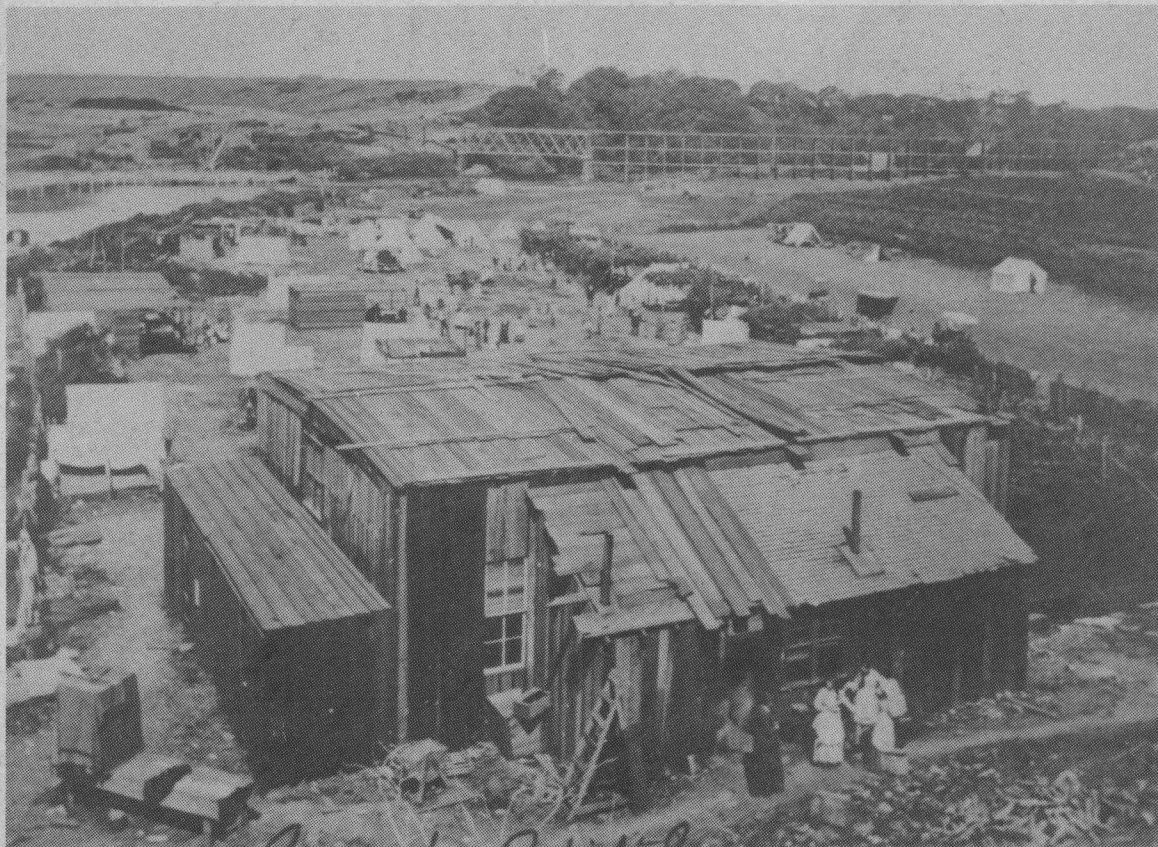
nals" of the local area. **Phil Reader** of Cliffside Publishing Company in Live Oak will soon release a book "on law and disorder in 19th Century Santa Cruz County," entitled *It Is Not My Intention to be Captured*.

"It is not my intention to be captured," according to Reader, was a phrase used by Branciforte bandit "**Charole**" **Faustino Lorenzana** as he held a pistol on Santa Cruz Sheriff **Albert Jones** in the Spring of 1867. Three years later, Lorenzana was good to his word, and died in a shootout with a posse in Santa Barbara.

Reader has chronicled villains large and small, from the vigilante actions of the "Horse Thief Protective Society" and the "Pajaro Property Protective Society" to the fate of men like **Billy Smith**, who stole a hog from Mayor **J.D. Chase** and got five years in San Quentin.

The list of pioneers, interesting and dull, important and ordinary, could go on and on. Every new arrival to this area contributed to its development and changed the course of history. The Spanish pioneers did much to erase the native population, intentional or not.

The coming of the American way of life nearly obliterated the Californios. During these generations, everything was uncertain and "up for grabs." The quick-thinking got the most; and history pats them on the back. But it may also be up to us to recognize those who were either unable or forbidden to pose in the portraits we have been led to honor. □



Capitola Camp, 1876. Buildings were constructed of scrap lumber. The railroad to Capitola was completed in 1876, and the camp opened in 1874.