

GHOST TOWNS OF THE S

'SILENT' CHARLEY WEIRD FIGURE IN MOUNTAIN ANNALS

Cracked Smart Whip Over Six Horse Team, Chewed, Swore, But Was A Lady.

By JOHN V. YOUNG. CHAPTER XVI. The Stage Coach and Charley Parkhurst.

(Copyright, 1934, by Mercury Herald Company.)

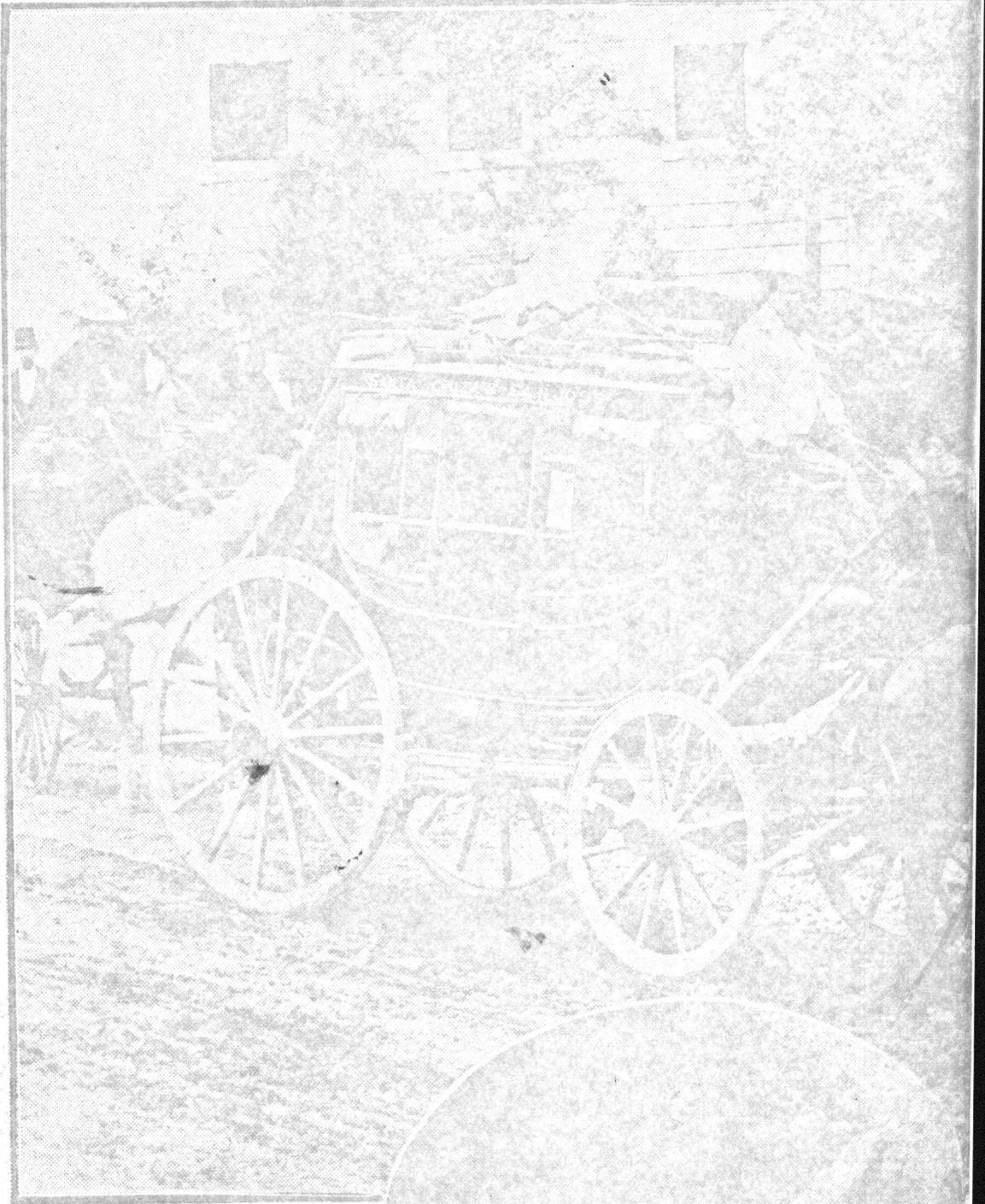
UPSET.—The stage for Santa Cruz, on Thursday last, containing eight or nine passengers, upset about a mile beyond Mountain Charley's, and rolled down a gulch about 150 feet. The passengers luckily tumbled out, and no one was seriously injured. The accident was caused by some hogs rushing down the hill and jumping among the horses while making a sharp turn around a point, causing them to jump off the grade.

This naive account of a freak accident, appearing in the weekly San Jose paper in 1865, gave a graphic picture of what was then a more or less commonplace incident of the stage road, and a first-hand view of the life of the times.

The hogs, incidentally, were Mountain Charley's (Charles McKiernan), and were more than half-wild. The accident took place at the curve at the head of Lynch hill, which was not named for the famous roping custom, but for a "retired" black-birder and ex-pirate, David Lynch, who had a little ranch in the region, according to recollections of Herbert Martin from his father, C. C. Martin. The Martins lived close by.

POWERFUL WHISTLE.

Among the amusing anecdotes of the road was one which describes his predecessor of the modern automobile horns—the teamster's throaty whistle. So narrow was the Jones road, and so sharp were the corners, that encountering another team suddenly was often as hazardous a procedure as meeting a speeding automobile on a narrow mountain road of today.



parties requiring a showy, careful driver.

HER EARLY STORY.

Continuing Major Judd's narrative, the account states:

"I suppose that here I should make a distinction between the

SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 24, 1934.

## SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS



### LEXINGTON'S BEAR STORY IS TALE OF MIGHTY COMBAT

#### Huge Frenchman Loses Left Arm But Clubs Bruin To Death With His Right.

and without further preliminaries he proceeded to slug Mrs. Bear in her exposed front quarters.

Back and forth they wrestled, man and bear, while the Frenchman's arm slowly was being reduced to hamburger. But the bear was first to quit, it is recorded. She unlimbered her jaws, ducked a parting swipe from the Frenchman's devastating right, and lit out for the tall timber.

#### BACK TO WORK.

Friends of the man found him unconscious from loss of blood on the trail to town, his left arm hanging in shreds. With the rude surgery of the time, they removed the arm at the shoulder, and our hero went back to work.

And the bear was found by a searching party who went out to exterminate her, lying dead in the bottom of the gulch, her innards smashed by the terrific blows of the Frenchman's right fist.

Less spectacular but probably more authentic is the story told by Frank Howell, son of the founder of Reservoir ranch two miles above Lexington. Howell's father, Watkins F. Howell, lost a horse on his ranch—it had died from eating a poisonous weed or something.

#### TRAP IS BUILT

When animal was found the next morning it was discovered that a grizzly had been feasting on its carass. Howell and young Alex Ogen, a relative, moved the carcass to a nearby tree and over it built a scaffold in the tree about 20 feet from the ground.

Just after moon-rise the two watchers in the tree spotted a she-grizzly and two large cubs emerging from the brush. They both fired, wounding the mother, who squalled, rolled over and then wobbled off into the brush again.

Howell fired again and wounded one of the cubs. Shortly thereafter Howell's two large dogs arrived on the scene, liberated by Mrs. Howell when she heard the cubs in accordance with a pre-arranged plan.

#### TRIED ALL NIGHT

#### BEAR FIGHTS COMMON.

Bear fights were common enough in the mountains in the fifties and early sixties, if all the old wives' tales of the region are to be believed, but few of them will stand close scrutiny. The story already published here of Mountain Char-

the automobile on a narrow mountain road of today.

As a warning the drivers of that time were accustomed to sounding a blast with their lips as they approached each curve—a sound that carried an incredible distance.

### STORY OBSCURE

This was the mountain scene when Lexington began, back in the fifties, and when Charley Parkhurst, noted stage driver and typical character of the period, first appeared to make history in the Santa Cruz mountains. Charley's full story has never been told, and probably never will be, but what little is known gives a clear picture of the customs, the manners, the dress and the views of the day of the stage coach.

Almost nothing is known of Charley's early life, although he became one of the most famous stage drivers on the San Jose-Santa Cruz run starting about 1863. Kicked in the face by one of his leaders, a huge horse called "Pete," Parkhurst lost one eye which he covered with a black patch.

Normally far from handsome, this patch, accompanied by habitually stained lips from excessive tobacco chewing and a saturnine cast of countenance, made Charley as tough looking as the most hardened and bewhiskered hillbilly in the mountain region.

### DEATH BARES SECRET

Profane to the extreme, cold and unfriendly, scarred and angular, Charley presented every appearance of a typical "whip" of the sixties, and until the day of his death, none suspected for a moment that Charley—was a woman!

She was born Charlotte Parkhurst, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick M. Parkhurst, about 1823 in Sandusky, O., according to information compiled by Leon Rowland of the Santa Cruz News.

In the spring of 1848 betrayed and deserted, she fled from home and finally came to California to drive stage in the mining country.

Ahead of her times in more ways than one, Charley even voted, 50 years before woman suffrage, for her name appears on the great register of Santa Cruz county in 1856.

Otherwise, she was typical of her times, as a stage driver.

### TYPICAL DRIVER

Like all knights of the overland, she wore a muffler, gloves, great coat of buffalo skin, and a cap of the same material, and blue jeans turned up about nine inches at the bottom to reveal the cuffs of a very good pair of trousers, it was recalled by Major A. N. Judd, whose remembrance of Parkhurst appeared in an article in the Santa Cruz Surf October 18, 1917.

Major Judd succeeded in tracing Charley's history back to the Indian days on the overland stage, where she first became noticed. In the role of a young lad she made her first appearance in a Vermont literary tale, according to another account written by John Royce of San Jose for the Santa Cruz Sentinel October 19, 1917.

Royce states that Charley rapidly became the most expert driver in the state, first as a two-horse driver, then four horses, and finally six, and was always entrusted with driving

live, the account states:

"I suppose that here I should make a distinction between the Sioux, Blackfoot and their ilk in the east, and the greaser that infested the western slopes of the Sierra, for they all had their fling at Charley Parkhurst.

"'Old Ben Holiday' was the moving spirit in the overland stage line. He had his office at Council Bluffs, Ia. Monday morning was his busy day in securing drivers to fill places vacated for former men whose hair had been raised either by fear or the scalping knife.

"The Indians were not the most fearsome thing to dread, for over the mountain roads were the perils of the steep and narrow grades, so narrow that on some turns the single-trees had cut grooves into the banks on the high side, and often the other side was a thousand feet to the first stopping place if the vehicle should go over.

### CHARLEY APPEARS.

"It was these dangers that also thinned out drivers fast and the one under discussion which brought Charley into notice for the first time.

"There were, perhaps, 50 applicants for the positions:

"'Ever driven stage?' 'How long?' 'How near could you drive to the edge of a bluff with a sheer drop of a thousand feet with perfect safety to yourself, team and passengers?' These were some of the questions fired at the prospective drivers.

"Many answered, until nearer and nearer they got to the edge. Finally, one was willing to take a chance in driving with one-half the tire over the cliff.

"About this time Charley's turn came around, and by this time he (she) was getting uneasy. After putting in between her jaws a fresh chew, she closed her jackknife that had done duty for years, not only cutting plug tobacco but about harness, in shortening a backstrap, or boring a new hole to let out a cross check.

### SHE GETS JOB.

"She nearly got to the door before she finished her answer: 'No, I won't suit you, Mr. Holiday, for I would keep as far from that cliff as the hubs would let me.'

"'Yes?' said Mr. Holiday. 'Well, you take this slip into that room yonder and tell the clerk to send you out by the first coach and put you on the Wasatch grade No. 4. You are just the man I want.'

"For three years she held that run without an accident, and would have stayed longer but the Mormons were of a marrying disposition, and rather than disclose her secret by marrying a few dames with polygamous proclivities, she left for the Pacific coast to take a position on the Pacheco route running to Monterey as a side kick with one of Watsonville's particular stars of the "ribbon" in those days, Sidney Conover.

### SID POPULAR.

"Sid had the advantage of Charley, at least in looks. Sid was large, strong and handsome, while Charley was the opposite. I was not the only one to notice the difference. Even the ladies seemed to travel more on the days that Sid drove, and strange to say, the men less.

Sid was a likeable man notwithstanding.

"Unfortunately, he had bad luck. On two consecutive days he was held up just this side of the Summit house at the first crossing of Pacheco creek—a rough place, causing a slowing down of the team.

"It was an ideal place for stage robbing, deep gulches with heavy chapparal on every side. Secret orders not to show any resistance was fortified by the timidity of his lady passengers, who begged him to throw down the express box.

### TOO MANY HOLDUPS

"There was something not wholly soothing in looking down the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun or a Colt's navy in the hands of a drunken greaser, whose courage was largely 40-rod whiskey. However, twice was enough for Sid. The W. J. Conner line from Monterey to 'Frisco' was in want of men and Sid was always in demand, so the change was made.

"This left the field all to Charley, who at the end of the month threw up the sponge also, as she fared no better than her friend, Sid. She then went to the Danforth Porter line that connected main lines with Santa Cruz.

"Charley was a great 'whip' and when she pulled into the old Nebraska house with a beautifully equipped 20-passenger Concord coach, drawn by six mustangs, as mettlesome as quarter horses, it was an inspiring scene indeed.

### ARTIST AT REINS.

"Every move played its part. One would note with what dexterity she pulled the brakes (as light as a feather, seemingly, without a jar), just right, in order to stop with the door just opposite the main entrance to the hotel.

"How deftly she, with her right hand, whirled the belly of the six-horse lash around the stock and

Halted in front of the steps house is a stage coach of the Santa Cruz legend on its side indicating (thorough-brace) that served as a vehicle which its bewhiskered driver drove a 1934 stream-lined automobile.

Below are some scenes from the fork on the old Mountain Chapel to a point south of Glenview stretch on the old San Jose road, as it is known today. In oval horse-trough near McKiernan's road. Both routes were traveled in the early days of the Santa Cruz

carefully laid it up on the deck above her head, all unconscious of the onlookers, and as she wrapped the lines around the foothold on the brake, she would hand from the boot treasure and mail; or, perhaps, some venturesome female who insisted on riding with the driver. The latter was, by the way, usually welcome, notwithstanding that in the early sixties hoops were very, very fashionable as well as Shaker bonnets. The latter hid the maiden's blushes from prying eyes.

### EXHILARATING RIDE

"If it were not for the walking up the mountains, as of yore, I would still like a ride on one of Abbott & Downing's old-time Concord coaches. Every moment was exhilarating, especially if one had a seat 'outside' with a trusty driver, who always seemed a part of each horse, each imbuing the other's buoyant enthusiasm.

"The wonderful control of those six lines, including the whip, was a marvel. Around those sharp turns on a mountain grade, the slightest mistake in handling of those 'ribbons' would mean ruin.

"The risks were greater on account of the team. Except two, the leaders, they were only partially

steps of the old San Jose court  
the San Jose and Santa Cruz run,  
imitates. Note the leather-straps  
used as springs for the lurching  
wheeled driver handled as if it were  
mobile.

from the old stage roads: A  
Charley road, which ran from  
of Glenwood (left), and a tree-  
San Jose Turnpike, or Soquel road  
oval is a crumbling redwood  
man's cabin on Mountain Charley  
traversed by stage-coaches in the  
Cruz mountains.

broke, and being of the wild mus-  
tangs of the times, breaking was  
complete when the driver could keep  
in the road, which was augmented  
by keeping them on the run for the  
first mile or two; sitting up there far  
above the team with a rocking mo-  
tion that sometimes seemed on the  
point of spilling one out of the front  
or throwing you out behind, yet  
those thorough-braces that consti-  
tuted the only springs came to the  
rescue.

#### LEATHER SPRINGS.

"These springs were of leather,  
each of the weight of 50 pounds.  
Their going price was a dollar a  
pound, thus the pair would cost not  
less than \$100, each with its many  
layers forming a long oval loop  
with body and gear so shaped as to  
permit the loops to form a cradle  
for the body, and with clamps and  
lighteners so arranged that riding  
was as easy as a boat ride in a gen-  
tle swell and with more so."

But this romantic picture soon  
faded, Major Judd recalled. The  
railroad reached the Twelve Mile  
house (out of Santa Cruz), where  
Charley had a station on the Santa  
Cruz-Los Gatos road opposite where  
the Lillenerantz house later stood.

The station was known as Sand Hill  
station.

Out of the stage business, Charley  
went back into the hills on the Hinn  
property, and later began raising  
stock on a location at the foot of  
Bean hill.

#### OLD AGE APPROACHES.

Between times she hauled for  
neighbors, until approaching old age  
rendered her infirm. She retired on  
money raised from the sale of her  
150 head of stock to Charley Moss  
of Moss Landing, and lived for a  
while near the old Seven-Mile  
House, adjoining the Stagleman  
property. Still later she moved to  
what was known as the Charley  
Moss place, then rented by a Mr.  
Harmon.

Her partner and companion in  
the cattle venture was another  
"bachelor", Frank Woodward, and  
from time to time one or the other  
worked on the San Andeas for  
Charles Silverer or for Major Judd,  
gulching wood.

In her last days, Charley was at-  
tended, all unsuspecting, by a son  
of the Harmon family, a 12-year-  
old lad named George F. Harmon,  
to whom Charley willed all her  
earthly possessions in return for his  
kindness. The possessions amounted  
to about \$600, deposited with Otto  
Stoesser in Watsonville.

Charley died in her lonely cabin  
December 29, 1879, an event that  
created quite a furor, for it was  
when she was "laid out" for the fu-  
neral that it was discovered for the  
first time that Charley was a  
woman. Charley's partner, Wood-  
ward, it is recorded, waxed profane  
to the extreme when he learned of  
the deception that had been prac-  
ticed on him so many years.

Mighty men—and women—were  
these pioneers of the Lexington re-  
gion, some of whose stories have  
come down to the present day with  
wondrous embellishments.

beved, but few of them will stand  
up to scrutiny. The story, already  
published here, of Mountain Char-  
ley McKiernan's battle with a she-  
grizzly is probably the most famous,  
and the most accurate in its pres-  
ent form because of the existence  
of written records describing it in  
detail.

But Lexington had a bear fight  
back in the days before the vil-  
lage was ever known as Lexington,  
but was still Jones' Mill, and what  
it lacks in historical accuracy it  
makes up in persistence, for it is  
told from Portola to Sargent and  
from Monterey to Los Gatos with-  
out varying much in detail.

#### BUILT LIKE CARNERA.

The hero of the tale was a gi-  
gantic Frenchman, whose name  
may be remembered by some old-  
timers, but has been forgotten by  
most. He was built on the general  
proportions of a Primo Carnera,  
with a mighty barrel chest, enorm-  
ous biceps and ham-like fists,  
feared neither God nor man, and  
had a particular dislike for grizzly  
bears.

On this particular occasion he was  
hunting in a gulch above the village,  
when he suddenly encountered a  
full-grown she-bear. He fired in-  
stantly, but only succeeded in  
wounding the bear in the shoulder.

The bear immediately charged,  
and the Frenchman attempted to  
club her off with his gun. The bear  
knocked the gun aside, reached out  
her paws and opened her jaws to  
crunch the interloper.

#### DESPERATE BOUT.

In desperation the Frenchman  
thrust his left wrist between the  
bear's jaws to hold her off. Amazed  
and angry, the bear seized the out-  
thrust arm with both her powerful  
paws. This maneuver left the  
Frenchman's mighty right arm free.

when she heard the cubs in ac-  
cordance with the pre-arranged plan.

#### TREED ALL NIGHT.

The dogs jumped the crippled cub  
in the heavy brush and fought for  
several hours. The next morning  
Howell and Ogan, who had not  
dared to venture down from the  
platform at night with a wounded  
bear in the caving, found a dead  
cub.

The old she they never saw again,  
although buzzards were seen a half-  
mile away in the direction the griz-  
zly had last started.

One of the last bears seen on the  
east side of the Santa Cruz ridge  
killed one of Watkins Howell's milk  
cows one morning in 1866. The cow  
failed to return to be milked at  
night as she usually did after wan-  
dering around the hills all day, and  
Howell and young Ogan again  
started out for a look-see.

#### LAST BEAR.

They found grizzly tracks about a  
mile from home, near the summit,  
and followed them cautiously down  
to discover the remains of the cow.  
She had apparently been startled by  
the bear, and in her headlong flight  
ran smack into a tree. The bear  
finished her off at leisure.

Howell and Ogan didn't linger  
long, as the brush was thick, but  
took the cowbell and departed hence.  
No sign of the bear was ever seen  
again, although the Howells believed  
it was the same animal that at-  
tacked and killed William Waddell  
over on Waddell creek six years  
later.

#### NEXT WEEK—Lexington Begins

—Jones' Mill becomes a mountain  
metropolis; the early mills and first  
families—the saga of the Howell  
family—romance and tragedy in the  
early days of one of the county's  
most important centers of the pe-  
riod of mountain prosperity.

## Old Bell Still Rings Every Sunday From Church at Skyland

(NOTE: Additions and corrections of stories already published  
will be printed here from time to time, together with letters from  
readers. Following is an excerpt from a letter from Mrs. Marian  
Wragg Harris, secretary, Highland Presbyterian Sunday School.)

#### HIGHLAND CHURCH

Our statement in the story of June 10 on Skyland that  
the Highland Presbyterian Church was no longer in use  
was in error, Mrs. Harris points out.

"The Church or Sunday school has never been closed  
since 1887, while the old bell (a gift of Mrs. McEwen many  
years ago) rings every Sunday.

"My father, Mr. Thomas B. Wragg, who passed away  
a month ago, was the elder until his death. He had been  
an elder for 25 years. . . .

"Mr. C. Martinie of Highland is the Sunday school  
superintendent, and Mr. Herbert Weicher, a student pas-  
tor from San Anselmo, has been conducting church ser-  
vices. . . and is also in charge of services at Burrell church.

"Very truly yours,

"MARIAN WRAGG HARRIS."