

Early California gold rush pioneer

By Jerry Bowen

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Some of Solano County's early residents are relatively unknown locally but when you look into their past you find that they left an impressive trail of actions and deeds.

Take the case of Rev. Alden Spooner Bayley and his sons. They lived in Batavia, once a small community about a mile southwest of Dixon. Several homes from the past still occupy the area today along Batavia Road.

Rev. Bayley was born in Derby, Vt., on March 30, 1802. He graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont in 1823, and after a short period of teaching, became a Baptist clergyman and moved to Georgia where he taught and preached. In 1827, he married Euphrasia Gibson who was from Georgia.

In 1828, Rev. and Mrs. Bayley moved to Columbus, Miss., where he engaged in the mercantile business. They moved to his farm at Ellwood, Miss. in 1840. His wife died there in February 1843, leaving six children. During the next five years, he served as the president of a young ladies seminary at Middleton, Miss.

Then, in 1846, he married Mrs. Evellne Stovall Burton, a widow with three children (Julia, James, and Charles Burton).

In 1848, his health began failing. So, taking his three sons, Thomas, George and Joshua, he joined the Capt. Joseph Childs emigrant train on Oct. 4 and headed for Oregon in the hope that the climate would improve his physical condition.

When they reached Fort Hall, they found there was an uprising of Indians and the decision was made to head for California instead. In Nevada, somewhere on the Humboldt River, they met a party of Mormons returning to Salt Lake City, who told them of the fabulous gold discovery in California.

The discovery of gold was to have a big influence on the Bayley family.

After five months of tedious travel they arrived at Ringold near Placerville. Several families remained there while others continued their journey on to the valley, some settling at Sacramento, San Jose, Napa, and still others at new settlements.

Bayley decided to remain for a while and the cabin they built was soon the social center

for the area. In a family history, his son Thomas stated, "Some of the ladies who danced on that dirt floor have danced since to grand music and in fine palaces in San Francisco. They might be ashamed to acknowledge their first dance in California. Therefore I will mention no names."

During a trip to San Francisco to get supplies, Alden met Capt. Sutter and found out that part of his fort at Sacramento and the sawmill in Coloma, where gold was discovered, was for sale. Alden bought the main building at the Fort (which was then kept as a hotel) and gave his note for \$7,000. He also bought a two-thirds interest in the mill at Coloma for which he gave his note for \$1,000. James Marshall, owning the other one-third, would not sell at any price. The next day Bayley was offered \$20,000 for the hotel, but did not sell.

Returning to Ringold, Bayley sold half of his interest to the McClelland family with the condition that they would move to the fort and run the hotel. Thomas Bayley accompanied the McClellands to the hotel.

After several months of very profitable business, Bayley sold his remaining interest in the hotel to a Mr. Tierney for \$3,500 in cash and a note for \$7,500. Later, business fell off and both Tierney and McClelland defaulted on their notes and the hotel returned to Bayley's ownership.

Bayley rented the fort to French gardeners in 1852 and they disappeared later without paying. Eventually he lost the hotel to taxes and problems with the land grant.

Bayley sold half of his interest in the sawmill at Coloma to John Winter. After the facility was improved, good money was being made in the sale of lumber.

Winter conceived the idea of building up Coloma, using the lumber to build houses that did not, when finished, sell for half what the material cost.

Bayley, being occupied with other business interests, and not being satisfied with Winter's management, sold his remaining interest in the sawmill to Clarkson Dye for \$60,000. Dye arranged for the payments to be \$400 per day or 1,000 feet of lumber.

After paying a few installments, Dye managed, by misrepresentation, to evade further payments and used the lumber to build what was later known as the Winters Hotel. Bayley, on finding that he would get nothing out of the property as things were going, convinced Dye to give him possession of the mill and the unfinished hotel.

Lawyers stepped in, however, and Dye tried to get possession of the property. With litigation pending, Bayley and Winter furnished the hotel at a cost of \$4,000 and ran it

during the winter of 1849. Though it did an immense business, it did not pay because of daily rains that made it impossible to get provisions except at great cost.

In 1850, Dye sued for possession of the hotel. After a hotly contested suit, the judge gave judgment to Dye, with damages assessed at \$15,000. Rather than give bonds, Bayley gave possession of the property and appealed to the Supreme Court. The judgment was reversed later

Bayley returned to Mississippi in 1853, with his health greatly improved. He established a school known as Ellwood College, where he taught for the next two years until elected president of a large college for women at Lexington, Miss. In the fall of 1858 his health again failed, and taking his entire family, he once more started for California - this time by steamer. Two days before landing at San Francisco he had a stroke and never regained his health. The family settled at Batavia, Solano County, where he died May 20, 1865. He is buried in the cemetery at Dixon. His wife, Eviline, died Sept. 7, 1878, and is buried alongside her husband.

Bayley's sons - George, Thomas and Joshua - later became prominent landowners in the Batavia area. There is much more to the story of the Bayley family; including Bayley himself, the first overland mailbag to California and establishing the first ferry across the American River. In addition, a blistering appraisal of James Marshall by Thomas Bayley provides a different insight to the "discoverer of gold in California."

If you are interested in learning more about the Bayleys, a copy of the family history is located at the Vacaville Heritage Council on East Main Street in Vacaville.

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