

# Pioneers took the road less traveled

By Jerry Bowen

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For several years I've had the pleasure of traveling many sections of the old trails that led the pioneers to California.

One of them, which cuts through upper Arizona, was originally called the Beale Wagon Road after the man who laid it out, Lt. Edward Beale. It later became part of the old Mojave Road.

So what does a trail in Arizona and southern California have to do with Solano County? Well, it has a direct association with Vacaville, the Nut Tree, and the Udell family that lived in Allendale. In addition, it will give another perspective of the trip to California with the wagon train that ferried a young Sally Fox to California, whose story we've detailed in previous columns.

John Udell III was born in New York City on June 22, 1795. He married Emily Merrill Dec. 8, 1816, and during the next 30 years he moved his family 15 times. You might say he had a tendency to be a "rolling stone." In 1853 and again in 1854 he traveled the California Trail to try his luck in the gold diggings.

On the first trip, two of John's sons, Oliver and Henry, remained in California when he returned to his farm in Missouri. Oliver and his wife, Caroline, homesteaded and bought land in the Allendale area and today's Udell Road is named after the family.

In 1858, at the age of 63, John and his wife decided to make one last trip to California. He kept a diary of his travels on the Santa Fe Trail and the new Beale Wagon Road.

In the opening paragraph of his diary he wrote, "During the month of March I was engaged in preparing to emigrate to California, across the Plains, with my aged wife, she being in the sixty-fifth year of her age, and I in my sixty-fourth (actually 63rd) year of my age. Our object in starting on so long and dangerous a journey, at such an advanced age, was, to have the care of, and to be sustained by, our children residing in California, in our feeble old age."

Initially the trails and roads were in good shape and food and water supplies adequate.

As they trekked to the head of the Santa Fe Trail, they joined with other small groups of travelers. One of the first groups was the J.L. Rose and Alpha Brown wagon train.

Alpha Brown was Sallie Fox's stepfather and leader of the wagon train.

On June 3, 1858, John noted: "Our large company continues harmonious and healthy, for which I am thankful to the Lord. Travel today 22 miles, and 549 from Missouri River."

By June 22, the train encamped two miles from Albuquerque, New Mexico, a small pueblo then. They stayed in the Albuquerque area for several days resting and making arrangements for the rest of the trip to California.

On June 25, John wrote, "Through the influence of the citizens of this place, our company had, all except myself, agreed to take Mr. Beale's newly-explored route, and leave the old traveled road here, and undertake to travel nine-hundred miles through altogether savage and mountainous country, all the way without any road, except the trail of a few explorers, which could not be found much of the way by a stranger."

John, who was no stranger to the rigors of traveling overland to California, opposed the change of direction but the other members of the train voted for the Beale Wagon Road. Unfortunately, John's concerns would later prove to be right on the mark.

Rumblings of discontent were in the early stages as Rose arrogantly assumed command of the Wagon Train. A guide was essential for the new route and Rose decided to hire Jose Manuel Saevadra based on the recommendations of some of the citizens of Albuquerque. The guide was to receive \$500 for his supposed "expert" services.

Some of the citizens of Albuquerque donated \$180 toward the total cost of the fee. The arrogant Mr. Rose attempted to coerce the other members of the train to pay the remainder of the bill while he paid nothing. At least on this account, the rest of the wagon train members insisted he pay his fair share.

In all fairness to Mr. Rose, there was no way to determine if Saevadra's experience as a guide for the Beale route was creditable. To their misfortune, they would soon learn their "expert" guide had been absolutely useless to Lt. Beale during the initial exploration for the route.

In his journal, Udell commented, "Mr. J.L. Rose and Mr. Gillum Bailey were the largest owners of the train. We all expected to participate in the hiring of the guide; but as I commenced talking on the subject, says Mr. Rose: 'Mr. Udell, Mr. Bailey and I can attend to this business without your help, and after the guide is hired, you can have the benefit of him with the rest, by paying him what we think is right.' Such an insulting expression from a German aristocrat caused the blood of a free-born American to

rankle in my bosom.”

Up to this time, the trip had been reasonably easy, but on the first day out from Albuquerque, the first of many mishaps struck; Frank Emerdick, one of Rose’s men, drowned while crossing the Rio Grande River.

On June 30, 1858, the wagon train began its passage on the Beale Road. The future of all the members of the train would soon turn into an ordeal they could little imagine at the time.

So with that, I’ll stop at this point and will continue the story of the exciting and trying journey of the Udells’ to Solano County in my next column. For those of you who are interested in reading the actual journal written by Udell, a reprint is available in the files at the Vacaville Heritage council.

In my opinion it is far more interesting to read the real thing than any fiction novel, and if you are so inclined, you can visit many parts of the trail, some of it little changed since 1858.

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