

Gold lured him West, and to Solano

By Jerry Bowen

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In my last article, I mentioned the stone barn on the Baldwin Ranch. But who were the Baldwins and what is their claim to a place in the history of Solano County?

Jabey M. (J. M.) Baldwin was born in Troy Township, Bradford County, Pennsylvania, June 14, 1826. His father died in 1836 when he was but 10 years old. As he grew to manhood, he learned the carpentry and joiner's trade.

With the lure of gold in California exciting many of the young men of the time, he embarked on a ship sailing from New York on Oct. 16, 1852, via the Nicaragua route for the far west, arriving in San Francisco in November.

The winter of 1852-53 was the year of the great flood in Sacramento, which provided an opportunity for J.M. to utilize his carpentry skills. He spent the winter in Sacramento building boats, which brought fabulous prices, and on the side, he prospected for gold in Amador and El Dorado counties.

He went to Oregon in May 1854, but returned to San Francisco two months later where he remained until July of the same year.

We next find J.M. at Genoa, Nev., (then known as Mormon Station or Mormontown) where he assisted Thomas Knott with the building of a grist and sawmill.

It was at Mormon Station that Mr. Baldwin met and formed a partnership with L.B. Abernathy, who also became one of the early landowners in Solano County's Green Valley. Together, with R.D. Sides, they recorded a Carson Valley land claim for a farm as partners Dec. 20, 1854. On August 30, 1855, the three partners bought additional land from a Julius Peltier. Baldwin moved to Carson Valley to run the farm. He also assisted S.A. Nevers in erecting the very first home in the new town of Carson City.

Baldwin farmed in Carson valley for the next few years, raising hay and feed to supply the numerous immigrants with animals on their way west. In a 1937 article, Rosa Lee Baldwin stated, "he was one of the originators of the expression 'tenderfoot,' referring to the tender, bleeding feet of worn-out oxen," a claim that would be very difficult to substantiate.

Over the next few years, he made several trips to Suisun Valley and while there in 1859

he received news from his friends, Sides, Best and Belcher, about the famous Comstock silver boom. He immediately returned to Nevada and became one of the original mining claim locators of the fabulously rich Best and Belcher silver mine. The famous team of Mackay, Flood, Fair and O'Brien gained control of the mine in later years.

Now we know a little about Jabey Baldwin, but what about his wife, Caroline (Carey) Baldwin? For that we need to turn back the pages of time a little.

Caroline Carey was born at Richland, N.Y., March 17, 1843, a direct descendant of Levi Carey, who came to America with the Pilgrims. She also was a direct descendant of Alice and Phoebe Carey, who were renowned writers of their time.

Caroline crossed the continent with her parents, a younger brother, and widowed sister with her three children in a wagon train from Lake Geneva, Wis., in 1850 to the "land of plenty." Well-educated in the schools of her hometown, she took charge of the children's education during the crossing.

The trip had been without major mishaps until they crossed the border and passed Lake Bigler, as Lake Tahoe was known then.

One evening, when the camp had settled down for the night, Caroline's father, who was the wagon train leader, suddenly became ill with a congestive chill. Frantic attendants rushed to his aid with home remedies, but to no avail and he passed away. Stricken with sorrow, the family and members of the wagon train buried him at what is known today as Strawberry, on Highway 50, about 20 miles southwest of South Lake Tahoe.

They continued on their way the following morning, and a few days later they arrived at Placerville to join Caroline's two older brothers, John and Joseph Carey. The brothers had preceded them by several months. According to Rosa Lee Baldwin, these two men, carpenter and blacksmith, respectively, built the original Carey house at Placerville.

It was not long before Caroline Carey was chosen to teach at the school in "Coon Hollow," a short distance from Placerville. Many years later she was guest of honor at a reception given by the school's alumni in honor of their first teacher.

The Carey family was not destined to remain long in Placerville, for the men grew restless and longed for more farming activities. Mining held no special appeal to them. In the fall of 1861, Caroline's brother, Joseph, was married to Miss Mary Alcinda Steel of Sacramento, and the following spring the entire family, including Caroline, moved near Antioch in Contra Costa County. The men each bought 860 acres and raised hay,

grain and stock, an occupation that was far more to their liking.

In the summer of 1864, Miss Caroline Carey, who was then teaching in the Antioch schools, went on a vacation journey to Carson, Nev. It was while visiting at the home of relatives there, that she met J.M. Baldwin.

They fell in love and were married Sept. 10, 1864.

Shortly after their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin came to Suisun Valley and located at the present site of the old family farm adjoining Rockville Corners.

The old Baldwin home was erected in 1864, and was always a great assembling place for the entire neighborhood. During the same year, L.B. Abernathy, who also came here in 1864, built the big house on Abernathy Lane in Suisun Valley, and it was for him the lane was named.

Well, that about wraps it up for now, but in my next article I will continue with a bit more history of the Baldwins and their neighbors who were so much a part of beautiful Green Valley.

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